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YANKEE BOYS IN JAPAN



“With a shrill cry trembling upon his lips, Nattie felt himself falling through space.

(See page 107)

YANKEE BOYS IN JAPAN

OR

THE YOUNG MERCHANTS OF
YOKOHAMA

BY

HENRY HARRISON LEWIS

AUTHOR OF

"The Valley of Mystery," "Won at West Point,"
"King of the Islands," etc.



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Yankee Boys in Japan

YANKEE BOYS IN JAPAN
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YANKEE BOYS IN JAPAN.

CHAPTER I.

THREE CHARACTERS ARE INTRODUCED.

It was early in the afternoon of a July day. A warm sun beaming down with almost tropical fervency glinted through the open windows of an office in the foreign settlement of Yokohama, Japan. The room, a large one, furnished with desks and chairs, and the various equipments of such an apartment, contained a solitary occupant.

He—it was a youth of not more than nineteen years of age—was leaning back in an easy, revolving chair, with his hands resting upon an account book laid open on a light bamboo desk. His face, as seen in the glare of the light, was peculiar. The expression was that termed old-fashioned by some. He had queer, puckered eyes, and many wrinkles here and there, but the chin was firm and resolute, and the forehead lofty—marks of intelligence and great shrewdness.

There was something in the pose of the body, however,

8 Three Characters are Introduced.

that did not denote either gracefulness or symmetry. Presently he arose from his chair and moved with a halting gait toward a window opening into an outer court. Then it became evident that he was a cripple.

One leg, the right, was shorter than its mate. There was also a droop in the shoulders that betokened a lack of physical strength, or many years of ill health. Notwithstanding this misfortune, the youth had a cheerful nature. As he glanced out into the court, with its huge-leaved palms, shady maples, and the ever-present bamboos, he whistled softly to himself.

Presently the faint tinkling notes of a *samisen*—a native square-shaped banjo—came to his ears from a neighboring building. Then the rat-tat of the hourglass-shaped drum called *tsuzumi* joined in, and the air was filled with a weird melody.

With something like a sigh, the young man turned back to his work. Bending over the book, he added up interminable columns of figures, jotting down the results upon a pad at his elbow.

A stranger entering from the teeming street would have noted something amiss in this office. He would have seen that the half-dozen desks, with the exception of that being used by the solitary occupant, were thickly covered with dust.

A delicate tracery of cobwebs held in its bondage the majority of the chairs. There were others festooning the row of books and pasteboard files upon a number of shelves lining the walls. Over in one corner was an open fireplace, looking grim and rusted, and above a lacquered side table swung a parrot cage, desolate and empty. It was a scene of disuse, and it had its meaning.

It was the counting-room of John Manning, "Importer and Trader," as a tarnished gilt sign over the outer door informed the passerby. But the master of it, and of the huge warehouse back on the bay, had gone to his last rest many months before.

He had been the sole owner of the business—which rumor said had fallen into decay—and when he went to join his helpmate, he left two sons to fight the battle of life. One, Grant Manning, we now see hard at work in the old office. The other, Nathaniel Manning, or "Nattie," as he was familiarly called by his associates, was at that moment on his way to the office to join his brother.

Just fifteen years had John Manning conducted business as an importer and trader in the foreign quarter of Yokohama. At first his firm had prospered, but the coming of new people, and severe competition had finally almost forced the American to the wall.

He died leaving his affairs in a muddle, and now Grant,

10 Three Characters are Introduced.

after months of delay and litigation, was puzzling his brain over the carelessly kept books and accounts. Five years previous Nattie had been sent home to New England to school. He was on the point of entering Harvard when the word came that his father had suddenly passed away.

In the letter Grant had added that but little remained of their father's money, and that his presence was also needed to help settle the accounts. For several months after Nattie's arrival in Japan nothing could be done. At last the elder brother had cleared up matters sufficiently for the boys to see where they stood.

On the day on which this story opens Grant had arranged an appointment with his brother, and was now awaiting his coming with the patience characteristic of him.

The task he had taken upon himself was not the lightest in the world. The books were in almost hopeless confusion, but by dint of hard application Grant had finally made out a trial balance sheet. As he was adding the finishing touches to this, he suddenly heard the sounds of an animated controversy in the street.

An exclamation uttered in a familiar voice caused him to hastily leave his desk and open the door leading outside. As he did so a couple of *jinrikishas*—two-wheeled carriages pulled by coolies—came into sudden collision di-

rectly in front of the office. Each vehicle was occupied by a fashionably dressed lad.

They were gesticulating angrily, and seemed on the point of coming to blows. The *kurumayas*, or *jinrikisha* men, were also bent on hostilities, and the extraordinary scene was attracting a dense crowd of blue-costumed natives. Rushing bareheaded into the street, Grant grasped one of the lads by the arm, and exclaimed:

"What under the sun does this mean, Nattie? What is the cause of this disgraceful row?"

"It's that cad, Ralph Black," was the wrathful reply. "He made his *kurumaya* run the '*rikisha* in front of mine on purpose to provoke a quarrel. He will have enough of it if he don't look out."

"Not from you, Nattie Manning!" insolently called out the youth in the other vehicle. "You are very high and mighty for a pauper."

Nattie gave a leap from his carriage with the evident intention of wreaking summary vengeance upon his insulter, but he was restrained by Grant.

Ralph Black, a stocky-built youth of eighteen, with an unhealthy complexion, probably thought that discretion was the better part of valor as he hastily bade his *kurumaya* carry him from the spot.

The brothers gave a final glance after the disappearing

jinrikisha, and then entered the office, leaving the crowd of straw-sandaled natives to disperse before the efforts of a tardy policeman.

"Nattie, when will you ever learn to avoid these disgraceful rows?" remarked Grant, seating himself at his desk. "Since your return from the States you have quarreled with Ralph Black four or five times."

"I acknowledge it, brother, but, really, I can't help it," replied Nattie, throwing himself into a chair. "The confounded cad forces himself upon me whenever he can. He is insolent and overbearing, and I won't stand it. You know I never liked Ralph. Before I left for the States we were always rowing. He is a mean, contemptible sneak, and if there is anything on earth I hate it is that."

The lad's face flushed with passion, and as he spoke he struck the arm of the chair with his clinched fist. In both appearance and actions, the brothers were totally different. Stalwart for his age, clean-limbed, a handsome face, crowned by dark, clustering hair, Nattie would have attracted admiration anywhere.

As stated before, Grant was a cripple, deformed and possessed of a quaint, old-fashioned countenance, but readers of human nature would have lingered longer over the breadth of his brow, and the kindly, resolute chin.

Nattie would have delighted athletes, but his elder brother—a truce to descriptions, let their characters speak for themselves as the story progresses.

Grant smiled reprovingly. He had a great liking for Nattie, but he regretted his impulsiveness. None knew better than he that the lad was all right in his heart, but he needed a rudder to his ship of life.

“I suppose it is hard to bear sometimes,” he acknowledged. “It is a pity that you are compelled to antagonize the fellow just when we are placed in such a predicament. I have gone over the books from end to end, but I declare I can’t find any further references to the payment of the debt.”

“We are sure father settled it, anyway.”

“But we can’t prove it, more’s the pity. The last entry in father’s personal account book is this: ‘Paid this date the sum of five thousand, six hundred dollars (\$5,600.00) to——’ it ends there.” Grant’s voice lowered as he added: “At that moment he fell from his chair, you know, and died before help could come.”

Both were silent for a while, then Nattie reached for the book in question, and glanced over it. Finally he said, with decision:

“That entry certainly means that father paid back Mr.

Black the debt of five thousand dollars, with six per cent. interest for two years, on the day of his death."

"There isn't the slightest doubt of it in my mind. I cannot find the faintest trace of any similar debt in the books. But Mr. Black swears the amount was not paid, and he threatens to sue the estate."

"Nice work for a reputable English exporting merchant. But I don't put it above him. The sire of such a son as Ralph Black would do almost anything, in my opinion."

CHAPTER II.

NATTIE ARRIVES OPPORTUNELY.

"I am afraid he will push us to the wall if he can," replied Grant, taking up the balance sheet. "If Mr. Black compels us to pay, or rather repay the debt, it will leave us penniless. This little trouble with Ralph will probably cause him to take immediate action. Ralph has great influence over his father, you know."

"How does the estate stand?" asked Nattie, flecking a speck of dust from his carefully creased trousers.

"Badly enough. Briefly speaking, our liabilities, not counting the Black debt, are seventy-three thousand, eight hundred and ten dollars and forty-three cents, and the available assets, including everything—this building, the warehouse, and our home on the heights—are exactly eighty thousand dollars."

"Then we would have over six thousand dollars to the good if we could prove that father had really paid the English importing merchant?"

"Yes, in round numbers. Six thousand one hundred and eighty-nine dollars and fifty-seven cents. But there is

no use in beating around the bush, Nattie. We must face the issue squarely. We can't prove it, and we are ruined."

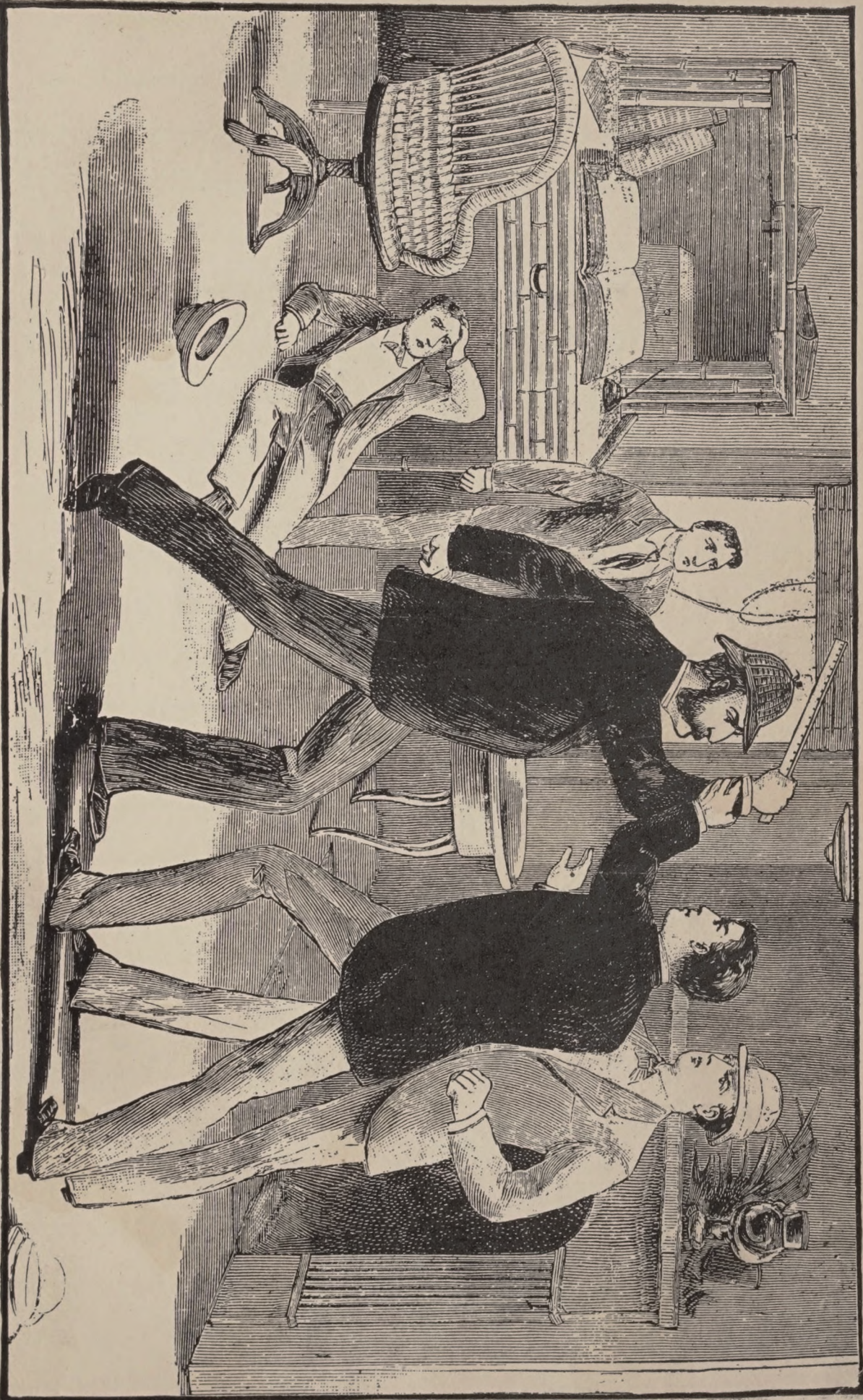
The younger brother sprang to his feet and paced restlessly up and down the office. There was a gleam in his eyes that boded ill for certain persons if they should ever be placed in his power. Halting abruptly in front of Grant, he said, passionately:

"It's a confounded shame that we should lose everything. Father was fifteen years building up this trade, and now it must all go because of that villain's treachery. You have gone over the books and know how the business stands. If we had money could we continue the business with any success?"

"Well, I should say so," replied Grant, earnestly. "We have been agents and correspondents of the best American houses. Why, when the business stopped, father had orders for almost one hundred thousand dollars' worth of petroleum, flour, calico, sugar and machinery. Then there are the exports. The firm of Broadhead & Company, of Philadelphia, wanted a consignment of rice and silk."

"You are well known to the government people also."

"None better. I can say without boasting that I stand higher with them than any other foreigner in business here. There is Yoshisada Udono, the secretary to the Minister of War; and the sub-admiral of the navy, Tan-



"As Black raised the heavy ruler to strike at Nattie, the latter's companion ran forward and grasped his arm."

(See page 22)

aka Tamotsu. I have some influence with both, and in case of supplies I think I can hold my own. But what is the use of talking. We haven't the money, nor can we get it."

Nattie walked over to the window leading into the court, and glanced thoughtfully at the boxed walks, now overgrown with weeds. He plucked a sprig of bamboo, and returned to the center of the room. There was a smile upon his face.

"I have a plan, brother, which may work and may not," he said. "It can be tried."

Grant leaned back and eyed him in silence.

"You remember Mori Okuma?" continued Nattie.

"Of course. I know him well. He returned to Japan with you. He has been at Yale for several years. What about him?"

"Coming over on the steamer I became very chummy with him. He is as nice a Japanese youth as you can find in sight of the volcano of Fuji San, which about includes the islands, you know. Well, his people are dead, and he is the sole heir to over fifty thousand dollars in good hard money."

"And you propose?"

"To ask him to go in with us," replied Nattie, quietly. "He told me he wished to invest his wealth if possible.

He thought of returning to the States, but he can be talked out of that. What do you think of it?"

Grant was visibly excited. He arose from his chair and paced back and forth with queer little steps. He ran one white hand over his brow in a way he had. His face lost some of its careworn expression, and he finally became radiant with hope.

"Nattie, if we can induce him to form a firm with us our fortunes are made," he said, eagerly. "Twenty thousand dollars, not half of his capital, will square up everything and place us in running order. Just think of it! It will mean the defeat of many ill-wishers; it will save father's name from the disgrace of a failure, and it'll keep the old house going. When can you see him? How about bringing him here this afternoon? I can show him the books in a jiffy."

"I declare, brother, this is really the first time I ever saw you excited," laughed Nattie. "Why, you positively look like another fellow. Just bide here for a while, and I'll look Mori up. He'll be down to the tea house near the bank, I suppose."

He brushed his sleeves where dust from the desk had soiled them, jauntily placed his cork sun-helmet upon his head, and sauntered from the offices, leaving Grant still trotting up and down in unwonted animation. The

latter was alert and boyish. His face actually beamed—it was wonderful how the hope had changed him.

The mere thought that money might be secured and the house—his father's firm in which he had loved to labor—would be saved from the disgrace of bankruptcy was enough. The youth—he was nothing more in years—whistled a merry air, and limped to the window leading into the street.

Drawing the curtain aside, he glanced forth, then started back with an exclamation of surprise.

“Ah, they are at work early,” he muttered. “I fancy the son's malevolence has brought this call.”

A knock sounded at the door. Grant threw it open, and bowed politely to a man and a youth standing upon the threshold. The former, an austere Englishman, with dark side whiskers and a peculiar pallor of face, entered first. He was followed by a stocky-built youth, clad in fashionable garments. It was father and son, comprising the well-known firm of importers and traders, Jesse Black & Company.

Ralph gave Grant a malicious glance and seemed particularly pleased at something. The elder Black marched majestically to a seat near the center of the desk, and, after brushing the dust from it, settled himself with a grunt. All this with not a word.

The head of the firm glanced half contemptuously at the many evidences of disuse surrounding him; then he drew from an inner pocket a bill with several lines of writing upon it. This he handed to Grant.

"I suppose you know why I am here?" he asked, in a harsh voice.

"I believe I can guess," quietly replied the cripple.

"That bill will tell you. This estate owes me five thousand, six hundred dollars, not counting later interest. I need the money. Can you pay it to-day?"

"Mr. Black, you know I cannot. It is simply impossible. I am trying to get affairs straightened up so that I can settle father's debts, but I am not quite ready."

"Make him pay or threaten to sue," muttered Ralph, in a voice intended for his father's ears.

Grant overheard the words, however. His eyes, generally so gentle, flashed, and he turned sharply on the ill-favored youth.

"I am conducting this conversation with Mr. Black," he said, sternly. "I understand why this note has been presented to-day. It is your doings. Simply because you had a quarrel with my brother, and he threatened to chastise you, you retaliate by demanding this money. If the truth was known, the entire debt was paid by my father on the day of his death."

For a moment a silence death-like in its intensity followed this bold speech. Father and son glared at Grant as if hardly believing their ears. The elder merchant's pallor seemed to increase, and he furtively moistened his lips with his tongue.

Ralph's face paled, and then flushed until the cords stood out in his forehead. Clinching his fists he strode over to where the cripple was standing near the bamboo desk.

"What's that you say?" he demanded, hoarsely. "Do you know what you mean, you puny wretch? It is an accusation of fraud, that's what it is. Retract those words, or I'll cram the lie down your throat."

If Grant had faults, cowardice was not one of them. He thoroughly realized that he would be no match in a tussle with Ralph Black, but that fact did not daunt his spirit.

"If you are coward enough to strike me, go ahead," he replied, calmly. "I will retract nothing. I say that I fully believe my father paid your debt on the day of his death. I know——"

He was interrupted by Ralph. Wild with rage, the youth reached out and grasped Grant with his left hand, then he raised the other, and was on the point of aiming a

blow at him when the front door suddenly flew back. Two young men stood in the opening.

There was an exclamation of amazement, which died away in a note of wrath, then one of the newcomers darted forward, and in the twinkling of an eye Master Ralph found himself lying under a tall desk considerably confused and hurt, both bodily and in feelings.

Then Nattie, for it was he, turned on Mr. Black, who tried to speak, but only stammering words came from his lips. The merchant had watched the affair with dilated eyes. He remained motionless until he saw his son stricken down; then, with a cry, he snatched up a heavy ruler lying upon the bamboo desk.

As he raised it to strike at Nattie, the latter's companion, who had hitherto remained in the doorway, ran forward and grasped his arm. There was a brief struggle, in which both Nattie and the newcomer participated, then the Blacks, father and son, found themselves forced into the street.

CHAPTER III.

GRANT IS MYSTERIOUS.

The occupants of the office waited for a few moments to see if the English merchant and his hopeful offspring cared to continue the scrimmage, but no attempt was made to open the door. Nattie glanced through the window, and saw them retreating up the street as fast as they could walk.

"Well, did you ever see the beat of that?" he finally exclaimed, turning back to his companions. "What is the meaning of it all, brother?"

Grant, who was still fuming with indignation, explained the affair in detail. Presently he quieted down and concluded by saying, regretfully:

"I am very sorry it occurred. To have such a row in this office is simply disgraceful. It also means an immediate suit for that debt, and any amount of trouble."

"We'll see if it can't be prevented," replied Nattie, cheerfully. "This is Mori Okuma, brother. You remember him."

The lame youth turned with outstretched hand and a smile of welcome to his brother's friend. The young

Japanese, whose modest garb and quiet manner proclaimed the high-class native, responded cordially to the greeting. He appeared to be not more than eighteen years of age. He had the kindly eyes and gentle expression of his race.

"I am greatly obliged to you for your assistance," said Grant. "But I must apologize for such a scene. It is unfortunate that you found this generally respectable office the theatre for a brawl. Believe me, it was entirely unsolicited on my part."

"Oh, Mori don't mind that," broke in Nattie, with a laugh. "I'll wager a *yen* it reminded him of old times. He was center rush in the Yale football team, you know."

Mori smiled, and shook a warning finger at his friend.

"I must confess that it did me good to see that old scoundrel thrown into the street," he said, naïvely. "I know him well. My father had dealings with him several years ago. And the son is a savage, too. He intended to strike you, the coward."

"I'll settle all scores with him one of these days," said Nattie, grimly. Then he added, in a businesslike voice: "I have spoken to Mori about the firm, brother. He thinks favorably of the idea, and is willing to consult with us on the subject. Suppose you show him the books and explain matters."

"I will do that with the greatest pleasure," replied

Grant, smilingly. "I presume my brother has told you about how we stand, Mr. Okuma?"

"Oh, bother formalities!" exclaimed Nattie, with characteristic impatience. "Call him Mori. He is one of us."

The young Japanese bowed courteously.

"We are friends," he said, "and I hope we will soon be partners."

The lame youth fervently echoed the wish. Calling attention to the balance sheet he had recently drawn up, he explained the items in detail, proving each statement by ample documents. Mori listened intelligently, nodding his approval from time to time.

Presently Nattie slipped out into the street, returning after a while with a *musmee*, a native tea-house waitress. The girl, *petite* and graceful in her light-blue robe and voluminous *obi*, carried in her hands a lacquered tray, upon which were three dainty cups and a pot of tea.

Sinking to her knees near the desk, the *musmee* placed the tray on the floor, and proceeded to serve the fragrant liquid. Work was stopped to partake of the usual afternoon refreshments, and the boys chatted on various subjects for five or ten minutes.

Finally Nattie gave the *musmee* a few *sen* (Japanese cents) and dismissed her. She performed several elaborate courtesies, and withdrew as silently as she had come.

The task of explaining the affairs of the firm of John Manning was resumed.

"Now you understand everything," said Grant, half an hour later. "You can see that with fresh capital we should carry on quite an extensive business. The Black debt, which I explained to you, has crippled us so that we will have to fail if we can't secure money. We believe it was paid, but unfortunately, there are no traces of the receipt."

"I hardly think Mr. Black would hesitate to do anything for money," replied Mori, thoughtfully. "Your esteemed father undoubtedly settled the debt."

"We have written contracts with the twelve American houses on this list," continued Grant. "Then there is the chance of securing that order from the government for the Maxim revolving cannon and the fifteen million cartridges. We also have a standing order for lacquered ware with four New York firms. In fact, we would have ample business for eight months ahead."

"There's money in it, Mori," chimed in Nattie. "I can't explain things like Grant, but I believe we can carry the majority of trade in this city and Tokio. What do you think of it?"

"I am quite impressed," replied the Japanese youth, with a smile. "I have no doubt that we can do an extensive business. You will pardon me if I defer giving

you an answer until to-morrow at this hour. As I understand it, you wish me to invest twenty thousand *yen* against your experience and the orders on hand?"

"And our contracts," quickly replied Grant. "They are strictly first-class."

"And the contracts," repeated Mori, bowing. "They are certainly valuable. I think you can rely upon a favorable answer to-morrow. Until then I will say *sayonara*."

"*Sayonara*. We will be here at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon," said Nattie and Grant, seeing their new friend to the door.

"Now, I call that settled," exclaimed the former, tossing his helmet in the air and adroitly catching it on the end of his cane. "I am certain Mori will go in with us. He's a thoroughly good fellow, and can be depended on."

Grant was not so demonstrative, but the happy expression on his face spoke volumes. He bustled about the office, restoring the books to the safe, closed the various windows, and then announced, cheerily:

"I think we deserve a little vacation, Nattie. Suppose we knock off now and have an early dinner out at home. Then we can go to the theatre to-night. Horikoshi Shu is going to play in the 'Forty-seven Ronins.'"

His brother shrugged his shoulders as if the latter prospect was not entirely to his taste.

"I confess I can't see much in Japanese theatricals since my visit to the States," he replied, "but we'll take it in. Dinner first, eh? Well, come along."

Leaving the office to the care of a watchman, they walked down the street toward the custom house. Grant recognized and bowed to a score of persons within the few blocks. It was evident that he was well known in the foreign mercantile circles of Yokohama.

"They will be surprised when they hear that we have resumed business," remarked Nattie, with a grin.

"It will be unpleasant news to some," replied his brother, dryly. "If we have the success I anticipate I wouldn't be astonished if we found the whole crew banded against us. Black & Company can influence the three German houses and probably others."

Nattie snapped his fingers in the air in defiance. They presently came to a *jinrikisha* stand, and selecting two vehicles promising comfort, were soon whirling away homeward. The distance to the suburb on the heights where the Mannings lived was fully three *ris*, or more than six miles, but the *karumayas* made little of the task.

These men, the "cab horses" of Japan, clad in their short tunics, straw sandals, and huge mushroom-shaped hats of the same material, possess wonderful energy. They think nothing of a couple of miles at full speed, and

the apparently careless manner in which they tread their way through mazes of crowded streets is awe-inspiring to the foreign visitor.

It was an old story to Grant and Nattie, however, and they leaned back against the soft cushions in comfort. After passing the custom house the *karumayas* turned into the Japanese town. Here the scene changed instantly.

Here the broad roads dwindled to narrow lanes lined with quaint wooden shops, apparently half paper-glazed windows. Broad banners bearing the peculiar native characters fluttered in the breeze. Here and there could be seen the efforts of an enterprising Japanese merchant to attract trade by means of enormous signs done in comical English.

The '*rikishas* whirled past crowded *sake*, or wine shops, with red-painted tubs full of queer liquor; past crockery stores with stock displayed on the floors; past tea houses from which came the everlasting strains of the *samisen* and *koto*; on, on, at full speed until at last a broad open way was gained which led to the heights.

Espying a native newsboy trotting by with his tinkling bell attached to his belt, Nattie called him, and purchased a copy of the English paper, the *Japan Mail*.

"I'll see what Brinkley has to say about the trade," he smiled. "To-day's work has interested me in the prices

of tea, and machinery, and cotton goods, and all of that class of truck. Hello! raw silk has gone up several cents. Rice is stationary, and tea is a trifle cheaper."

"That's good," called out Grant from the other *'rikisha*. "I can see my way to a good cargo for San Francisco if this deal with Mori comes to pass. Any mention made of purchases?"

"Black & Company are down for a full cargo of woollen and cotton goods, and the Berlin Importing Company advertise a thousand barrels of flour by next steamer."

"We can beat them on prices. They have to buy through a middle man, and we have a contract straight with Minneapolis. I'll see what——"

"Jove! here's something that touches me more than musty contracts," interrupted Nattie, eagerly scanning the paper. "The Committee on Sports of the Strangers' Club intend to hold a grand celebration on the seventh of July to celebrate the anniversary of Commodore Perry's arrival in the Bay of Yeddo, and the first wedge in the opening of Japan to the commerce of the foreign world. Subscriptions are asked."

"We will give five hundred dollars," promptly replied Grant. "In a case like this we must not be backward."

"That's good policy. You hold up the honor of our

house at that end, and I'll see that we don't suffer in the field."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, there are to be athletic sports galore," chuckled Nattie, in high glee. "A very novel programme is to be arranged. It will consist of ancient Japanese games and modern European matches. There is to be a grand wrestling contest among the foreign residents. That suits me clear down to the ground. And the funny thing about it is that no one is to know the name of his antagonist until he enters the ring."

"That will certainly add to the interest."

"I should say so. I am going to send my name in to the secretary to-morrow. Let me see; this is the second of July. That means four days for practice. I'll secure old Matsu Doi as a trainer. Whoop! there will be loads of fun, and—what under the sun is the matter?"

Grant had arisen in his *'rikisha* and was staring back at a shabby-appearing native house they had just passed. For the purpose of taking a short cut to the road leading up the bluff the *karumayas* had turned into a squalid part of the native town. The streets were narrow and winding, the buildings lining them mere shells of unpainted wood.

"What is the matter?" repeated Nattie, stopping the carriage.

Instead of replying, Grant tumbled from his *jinrikisha* with surprising agility, and stepped behind a screen in front of a rice shop. Then he beckoned to his mystified brother, and with a peremptory gesture ordered the *karu-mayas* to continue on up the street.



“With incredible quickness, Nattie produced a revolver from an inner pocket and fired point-blank, at the nearest Ronin.”

(See page 40)

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTACK OF THE RONINS.

“What on earth is the matter with you?” repeated Nattie, for the third time. “What have you seen?”

“Sh-h-h! there he is now,” replied Grant, peeping out from behind the screen. “I thought as much.”

The younger lad followed his brother's example, and peered forth. A few rods down the crooked street was a small tea house which bore the worst reputation of any in Yokohama. It was noted as being the resort for a class of dissolute Samurai, or Ronins, as they are generally termed.

These men, relics of the Ancient Order of Warriors, are scattered over the country in cities and towns. Some have finally exchanged the sword for the scales or plowshare, but there are others wedded to a life of arrogant ease, who have refused to work.

Too proud to beg, they are reduced to one recourse—thievery and ruffianism. The strict police laws of Japan keep them in general control, but many midnight robberies and assassinations are properly laid to their door.

On glancing from his place of concealment, Nattie saw

three men, whose dress and air of fierce brutality proclaimed them as Ronins, emerge from the tea house.

They were immediately followed by a stocky-built young man, clad in English costume. It was Ralph Black. He cast a cautious glance up and down the street, then set out at a rapid walk for the Bund, or foreign settlement.

Nattie gave a low whistle of surprise.

"Well, I declare!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible he has fallen so low as to frequent such a place?"

"I hardly think so," replied Grant.

"What was he doing in there, then?"

"I will tell you. He is out of sight now. Come, we'll catch up with the '*rikishas*. When we were passing that tea house I chanced to look through the window. Imagine my surprise when I saw Ralph engaged in close conversation with a villainous-looking Ronin. It struck me at once that something was up, so I motioned you to follow me from the carriages. What do you think of it?"

"It is deuced queer."

"Ralph Black is unscrupulous. He hates both of us, and in my opinion he wouldn't stop at anything to avenge himself."

"Then you think?"

"That he is arranging to have us assaulted some night by those villainous Ronins," replied Grant, gravely.

Nattie halted, and, clinching his fists, glanced back as if minded to return.

"If I thought so I'd settle it now," he said, angrily.

"Nonsense. What could you do in a row with three or four cutthroats? It is only a supposition of mine. I would be sorry to believe that even Ralph Black would conspire in such a cowardly manner. Still we should keep an eye out during the next week or so, anyway. Here are the *'rikishas*. Jump in, and we'll go home."

The balance of the trip to the bluff was made without incident. By the time the Manning residence was reached the incident had been displaced by something of apparent greater importance. Nattie's mind was filled with thoughts of the triumphs he intended to win in the wrestling match on the seventh of July, and Grant was equally well occupied in the impending resurrection of the importing firm.

The home of the Mannings—that occupied by them in summer—was a typical Japanese house. It was low and squat, consisted of one story only, and the walls were of hard wood eked out with bamboo ornaments. The numerous windows were glazed with oiled paper, and the roof was constructed of tiles painted a dark red. The grounds surrounding the structure were spacious, and in the rear stretched a garden abloom with richly-colored native plants. Ancient trees, maple, weeping willow, and

fir afforded ample shade from the afternoon sun, and here and there were scattered stone vases and Shinto images. A moderately-sized lake occupied the center of the garden.

Ranging along the front of the house was a raised balcony to which led a short flight of steps. Ascending to this, the boys removed their shoes, exchanging them for straw sandals. Passing through an open door, they entered the front room of the dwelling.

A servant clad in white garments immediately prostrated himself and awaited the commands of his masters. Grant briefly ordered dinner served at once. Other servants appeared, and by the shifting of a couple of panels (Japanese walls are movable) the apartment was enlarged.

The floor was of matting—delicate stuffed wicker an inch thick, and of spotless hue—and the entire room was devoid of either chair or table. To an American boy the preparations for dinner would have been surprising, to say the least. But Grant and Nattie were thoroughly conversant with native styles, and the only emotion they displayed was eager anticipation.

In lieu of tables were two little boxes about a foot square, the lids of which were lifted and laid on the body of the box, with the inner surface up. This was japanned

red, and the sides of the box a soft blue. Inside were stored rice bowl, vegetable dish, and chopstick case.

At the announcement of the meal, Grant and his brother seated themselves upon the floor and prepared to partake of the food set before them with equally as much appetite as if the feast had been spread in American fashion.

Both boys had lived the most of their youthful lives in Japan, and they had fallen into the quaint ways of the people with the adaptability of the young. Mr. Manning had early taken unto himself the literal meaning of the old saw, "When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do," and his sons had dutifully followed his example.

After dinner the boys sat for a while on the front balcony, and then prepared for the theatre. *Jinrikishas* were summoned, and a rapid journey made to the home of native acting in Yokohama.

The peculiarity of Japanese theatricals is that a play generally commences in the morning, and lasts until late at night. For this reason our heroes found the building comfortably filled with parties at that moment eating their simple evening repast.

The theatre was a large square structure, situated in the center of a small park. The interior was decorated with innumerable paper lanterns, and covering the walls were

enormous, gaudily-painted banners setting forth in Japanese characters the fame of the performers.

The stage filled one entire side, and was equipped with a curtain similar to those found in American theatres. There were no wings, however, and no exit except through the auditorium. On the remaining three sides were balconies, and near the ceiling was a familiar gallery filled with the native small boys.

The floor was barren of chairs, being divided into square pens, each holding four people. The partitions were one foot in height, and elevated gangways traversed the theatre at intervals, permitting of the passage of the audience to their respective boxes.

As usual in all Japanese structures, the spectators removed their shoes at the entrance, being provided with sandals by the management for the time being. The last act of the drama was commenced shortly after the boys reached their inclosure, and it proceeded without intermission until ten o'clock.

Grant and Nattie left ten minutes before the end for the purpose of avoiding the crowd. There were a number of people in front of the building and innumerable *'riki-shas* with their attendant *karumayas*. As the boys emerged from the door they were accosted by two men

dressed as coolies. Each exhibited a comfortable carriage, and their services were accepted without question.

"What shall it be, home?" asked Nattie, with a yawn.

"Yes, we may as well return. There is nothing going on in town," replied Grant. "I have a little writing to do, anyway."

Stepping into his vehicle, he bade the man make good time to the bluff. Both boys were preoccupied, and they paid little attention to the crowd through which they passed. They also failed to see a signal given by one of the supposed *karumayas* to a group of three natives standing near the corner of the theatre.

The easy swinging motion of the *jinrikishas* lulled their occupants to rest, and both Grant and his brother were on the verge of dozing before a dozen blocks had been covered.

The night was dark, it being the hour before the appearance of a new moon. Thick clouds also added to the obscurity, blotting out even the feeble rays of the starry canopy. A feeling of rain was in the air.

Down in the quarter where lay the foreign settlement a soft glow came from the electric lights. The deep-toned note of a steamer's whistle sounded from the bay. The bell of a modern clock tolled the half hour, and before the

echoing clangor had died away the two '*rikishas* carrying the boys came to a sudden stop.

Nattie aroused himself with a start and glanced around half angrily at being disturbed. Before he could utter a protest or ask the reason for the halt both coolies unceremoniously disappeared into a neighboring house.

Grant had barely time to notice that they were in a narrow way devoid of lanterns, when there came a rush of footsteps from behind, and three dark figures made an attack upon the carriage.

There was a vicious whiz of a heavy sound, and the right edge of Nattie's '*rikisha* body was neatly lopped off. The crashing of wood brought the boys to a realization of their position. They knew at once that they were being attacked by thugs.

With an exclamation of excitement, Nattie leaped from his carriage. Another spring, and he was close to Grant. Then, with incredible quickness, the resolute lad produced a revolver from an inner pocket and fired point-blank at the nearest Ronin.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WITH THE GLADSTONE BAG.

The extreme gloom and the excitement of the moment caused Nattie to aim badly, and the bullet whizzed past the object for which it was intended, striking the ground several paces away instead. The shot had one result, however.

It caused the assailants to hesitate. One even started to retreat, but he was checked by a guttural word from the evident leader. The slight delay was instantly taken advantage of by the boys. Still holding his weapon in readiness for use, Nattie hurriedly wheeled both '*rikishas*' between them and the Ronins.

Thus a barricade was formed behind which Grant and Nattie sought refuge without loss of time. As yet, not a word had been exchanged. In fact, the events had occurred in much less time than it takes to describe them. Now Grant took occasion to remark in tones of deep conviction:

"This is Ralph Black's work, Nattie. It is the sequel to my discovery of him in that low tea house this afternoon. He has bribed these cutthroats to assault us."

"No doubt. But we can't stop to probe the why and wherefore now. They intend to attack us again. It's a good job I brought this gun with me to-night. I have six shots left, and I'll put them to use if—look out! they are coming!"

While speaking, he noticed something stealthily advancing through the darkness. He took rapid aim, but before he could pull the trigger he was struck upon the shoulder by a stone which came from in front. The force of the blow was sufficient to send him staggering against one of the *'rikishas*. He dropped the revolver, but it was snatched up by Grant.

The lame youth instantly used it, firing hastily through the wheel of one of the carriages. A shrill cry of pain came from the shadows, then a loud shout sounded at the lower end of the street. Twinkling lights appeared, and then echoing footsteps indicated that relief was at hand.

The thugs were not slow in realizing that retreat was advisable under the circumstances. They gave the boys a parting volley of stones, then all three disappeared into an adjacent house.

"Are you injured, brother?" anxiously asked Grant, bending over Nattie.

"No; a bruise, that's all. The police are coming at last, eh? They must have heard the shots. What are you go-

ing to say about this affair? Will you mention your suspicions?"

"No; it would be useless. We have no proof that he set these men upon us. We must bide our time and watch the scamp. Hush! they are here."

A squad of Japanese police, carrying lanterns, dashed up at a run. Their leader, a sub-lieutenant, wearing a uniform similar to that of a French gendarme, flashed his light over the capsized *'rikishas* and their late occupants; then he asked the cause of the trouble in a respectful tone.

"We have been waylaid and attacked by three Ronins bent on robbery," replied Grant, in the native tongue. "We were on our way home from the theatre and while passing through this street were set upon and almost murdered."

"Which way did the scoundrels go?" hastily queried the lieutenant.

"Through that house. The *karumayas* fled in that direction also."

Leaving two of his men with the boys, the leader started in pursuit of the fugitives. No time was wasted in knocking for admission. One of the policemen placed his shoulder to the door and forced it back without much effort.

A moment later the sounds of crashing partitions and

a glare of light from within indicated that a strict search was being carried on. Grant and Nattie waited a moment; then the latter said:

“Suppose we go home. We might hang around here for hours. If they catch the rascals they can call for us at the house.”

Grant favored the suggestion. He told one of the policemen to inform the lieutenant of their address, then he and his brother secured a couple of *'rikishas* in an adjacent street, and were soon home once more. The excitement of the night attack had driven sleep from them, so they remained out upon the cool balcony and discussed the events of the day until a late hour.

After viewing the situation from all sides, it was finally decided that a waiting policy should prevail. To boldly accuse Ralph Black of such a nefarious plot without stronger proof was out of the question.

“If any of the Ronins or the *karumayas* are captured, they may be induced to confess,” said Grant. “In that case we can do something. Otherwise, we will have to bide our time.”

Both boys arose early on the following morning and started for the office immediately after breakfast. They called in at the main police station on their way down-

town and learned that nothing had been seen of the Ronins or *jinrikisha* men.

The officer in charge promised to have the city scoured for the wretches, and apologized profusely for the outrage. On reaching the office, Grant called in several coolies and set them to work cleaning up the interior. By noon the counting-room had lost its former appearance of neglect. The desks and other furniture were dusted, the books put in order, and everything arranged for immediate work.

At the "tiffin," or midday lunch hour, the brothers dropped in at a well-known restaurant on Main Street. As they entered the front door a youth arose hastily from a table in the center and disappeared through a side entrance. It was Ralph Black.

"If that don't signify guilt, I'm a chicken," remarked Nattie, with a grim smile. "He's a fool."

"All he needs is rope enough," replied Grant, in the same tone, "and he will save us the trouble of hanging him. I suppose he was ashamed or afraid to face us after last night's treacherous work."

On returning to the counting-room they found the young Japanese, Mori, awaiting them. To say that he was cordially greeted is but half the truth. There was an expression upon his face that promised success, and Nattie

wrung his hand until the genial native begged him to desist.

"My answer is ready," he announced, producing a bundle of papers. "I suppose you are anxious to know what it is?"

"You don't need to tell us," chuckled Nattie, "I can read it in your eyes. Shake, old boy! Success to the new firm!"

"You have guessed aright," said Mori. "And I echo with all my heart what you say. Success to the new firm of Manning Brothers & Okuma. If you will come with me to your consul we will ratify the contract without loss of time."

Grant's eyes were moist as he shook hands with the young Japanese.

"You are indeed a friend," he exclaimed, fervently. "You will lose nothing by it, I assure you. If hard work and constant application to duty will bring us success, I will guarantee that part of it."

An hour later the newly-formed firm of importers and traders was an acknowledged fact. In the presence of the American Consul as a witness, Mori paid into the foreign bank the sum of twenty thousand dollars, and Grant, as his late father's executor, turned over to the firm the

various contracts and the mortgages on the warehouse and office building.

"The very first thing we must see about is that debt of Black & Company," announced the lame youth. "It won't do to have the new firm sued. We will call at their office now and pay it under a written protest."

"Yes, and deposit their receipt in the bank," added Nattie, grimly.

"Nothing was found of the first receipt?" asked Mori, as they left the consulate.

"Not a sign. I have searched through all the papers in the office, but without result. There is some mystery about it. Father never was very orderly in keeping documents, but it is hard to believe that he would mislay a paper of that value."

"Who was in the office when your father—er—when the sad end came?"

"Three clerks under the charge of a bookkeeper named Willis Round. Mr. Round was seated at a desk next to father's at the moment. I was in the outer office."

"Was your father lying upon the floor when you were called?" asked Mori; then he added, hastily: "Forgive me if I pain you, Grant. Perhaps we had better allow the subject to drop."

"No, no. I see what you are driving at. You think that possibly Mr. Round may have stolen the receipt?"

"Exactly. Take a case like that; a valuable paper and an unscrupulous man within easy reach, and you can easily see what would happen. I don't remember this Mr. Round. What kind of a man was he?"

"I never liked him," spoke up Nattie. "He had a sneaking face, and was always grinning to himself, as if he had the laugh on other people. Then I saw him kick a poor dog one day, and a man who would do that is not to be trusted."

"I guess you are right," agreed Grant. "Come to think of it, I never liked Mr. Round myself. He was a thorough bookkeeper though, and knew his business."

"Where is he now?" asked Mori.

"I think he left for England. He was an Englishman, you know. After our firm closed he waited around town for a while, then I heard somebody say he returned to London."

The office of Black & Company was on the Bund, only a few squares from the consulate, so the boys walked there instead of taking the omnipresent *jinrikishas*. The building was a dingy structure of one story, and bore the usual sign over the door.

As Grant and his companions entered the outer office

a tall, thin man, carrying a much-worn Gladstone bag, brushed past them and vanished down the street. The lame youth glanced at the fellow's face, then he turned to Nattie with a low whistle.

"There's a queer thing," he said. "If that man wore side whiskers, I would wager anything that he was Mr. Willis Round himself."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BLACK RECEIVES A SURPRISE.

"You don't say?" ejaculated the lad, stopping near the door. "Why, perhaps it was. Wait, I'll follow him and see."

Before either Grant or Mori could offer an objection, Nattie darted from the office into the street. There were several clerks in the counting-room, and they eyed the newcomers curiously. At the far end of the room was a door leading into the private office of the firm.

A hum of voices came from within. Grant waited a moment undecided what to do, then he approached a clerk, and asked him to announce to Mr. Black that Grant Manning wished to see him on important business. The message produced immediate results.

The fellow had hardly disappeared when the senior member himself stalked majestically into the outer apartment. Waving an official document in one hand, he glowered at the lame youth and exclaimed, in a harsh voice:

"Your call will do you no good, sir. I have already instituted the suit. I suppose you have come to beg for time, as usual?"

"You suppose wrong, sir," coldly replied Grant.

"Well, what is the object of this visit, then?"

"Please make out a receipt for the full amount of our debt."

Mr. Black's face expressed the liveliest amazement. The door leading to the inner office creaked, and Ralph's familiar countenance appeared in the opening. It was evident that he had been listening.

"W-h-hat did you say?" gasped the merchant.

"Please make out a receipt in full for the money owed to you by the firm of Manning & Company," repeated Grant, calmly.

"Then you mean to pay it?"

"Yes."

"But how can you? It is over fifty-eight hundred dollars, boy."

"Five thousand, eight hundred and fifty dollars, in round numbers," replied the lame youth, in a business-like voice. "The receipt, please. I will draw you a check for the amount at once."

He drew a small book from his pocket, and proceeded to write the figures as if such items were mere bagatelles in his business. Mori, who had been an interested but silent spectator now stepped forward and whispered a few

words to Grant. The latter nodded, and said, again addressing Mr. Black:

“By the way, sir, I think you had better accompany me to the American or English consulate. In view of past happenings, I prefer to have a reputable witness to this payment.”

The merchant's face flushed a deep red, and then paled again. Before he could reply, Ralph emerged from the inner office and advanced toward Grant with his hands clinched and a threatening look upon his dark countenance.

“What do you mean, you scoundrel?” he stormed. “Do you dare to insult my father in his own office? I've a notion to——”

He broke off abruptly and lowered his hands. Mori had stepped before Grant in a manner there was no mistaking. The young Japanese was small of stature, but there was an air of muscular solidity about him which spoke eloquently of athletic training.

“No threats, Ralph Black,” he exclaimed, coolly. “We are here on a matter of business with your father. Please remember that you have to deal with me as well as Mr. Manning.”

“What have you to do with it?” grated the youth. “Mind your own business.”

"That is exactly what I am doing," was the suave reply.

"Enough of this contention," suddenly exclaimed Mr. Black, with a semblance of dignity. "Ralph, return to the inner office. I will soon settle these upstarts. Simmons, a receipt for the debt owed us by Manning."

The latter sentence was addressed to a clerk, who promptly came forward with the required paper. Taking it, the merchant extended his hand for the check. Grant hesitated and glanced at Mori. That youth nodded his head, and whispered:

"We may as well waive the precaution of having it paid before the consul. The receipt will answer the purpose. There are two of us, you know."

"Well, do you intend to pay?" impatiently demanded Mr. Black.

The lame youth gave him the check without deigning to reply. The merchant glanced at the amount, then he eyed the signature in evident surprise.

"What does this mean?" he asked, harshly. "This is signed 'Manning Brothers & Okuma.' What absurdity is this?"

"It means what it says, sir," answered Grant, a suspicion of triumph in his voice. "I may as well tell you what Yokohama will know before night. The importing

and trading firm of Manning & Company has been revived. Mr. Okuma here is a partner in the house, and we commence business at once. You act as if you do not believe me, sir. Please satisfy yourself by sending to the foreign bank."

As it happened, at that moment a clerk from the bank in question entered the office with some papers. A brief question addressed to him by the merchant brought instant proof of the lame youth's words. As if dazed, Mr. Black gave him the receipt and entered the inner office without a word. Grant and Mori left at once.

They looked up and down the street for Nattie, but he was not in sight. After waiting for several moments at the corner they set out for the counting-room. The young Japanese seemed preoccupied at first as if buried in thought, but he finally turned to his companion and said:

"There is something about this business of the Black debt that I do not understand. How is it you could find no trace of the payment at the bank or among your canceled checks? It would surely be there."

"Why, I thought I had explained that to you," replied Grant. "The money paid them by my father was in cash, not by check. I remember that on that day we had received almost six thousand dollars in English gold from

the skipper of a sailing ship. The money was placed in the small safe."

"And it was gone when you examined the safe after your father's death?"

"Exactly. That is why I am so positive the debt was paid. That fact and the unfinished entry in father's book is proof enough."

"It certainly is," replied Mori, with conviction. "Well, something may turn up in time to establish the fact. Here is the office. We will wait until Nattie returns."

In the meantime an important scene had taken place in the counting-room they had just left. After their departure, Mr. Black cleared his private apartment of his secretary and closing the door leading to the outer room, bade his son draw a chair up to the desk.

The merchant's face appeared grim and determined. He nervously arranged a pile of papers before him, and then, with the air of a man who had recently heard unpleasant news, he confronted Ralph.

"Did you hear what that crippled whelp said?" he asked.

"Yes," sullenly replied his son. "He's induced Mori Okuma to go in with him, and they intend to commence business at once."

"Do you know what that means to us?"

"Another rival, I suppose. Well, we needn't be afraid of them."

"Zounds! you can be stupid at times, sir. We have every reason to be alarmed at the formation of the new firm. If you paid more attention to the affairs of Black & Company and less to running around with the sports of Yokohama, you would be of more assistance to me."

"What is the matter now?" snarled the youth, arising from his chair. "These rows are getting too frequent, and I won't stand it. I am no baby to be reproved by you whenever you please. I won't——"

"Sit down!" thundered the merchant. "Don't be a fool." Then he added, more mildly: "Remember that I am your father, Ralph. It is sometimes necessary to reprove you as you must acknowledge. But enough of that now. We have a more weighty subject to discuss. You evidently do not see what this new firm means to us. I can explain in a few words. You have doubtless heard rumors of trouble with China about Corea?"

"Yes, but that is an old tale. I heard it two years past."

"Well, there is more truth in it now than you believe. I have private means of obtaining information. If I am not mistaken we will have war before the end of the present year."

“What of it?”

The merchant held up his hands in evident disgust.

“It is easy to be seen that you have little of the instincts of a merchant in you,” he said, bitterly. “Hold! I do not intend to reprove you. I will not waste the time. If you don’t know, I will tell you that war means the expenditure of money, and the purchase of arms and stores. I know that the government is preparing for the coming conflict, and that they need guns and ammunition and canned provisions.”

“Why don’t you try for the contracts then?”

“I intend to. As you may remember, that little affair of the fodder last year for the cavalry horses has hurt my credit with the war department. I think I still stand a show, however—if there are no other bidders.”

“How about the German firms?”

“Their rivalry won’t amount to anything, but if this Grant Manning comes in he will secure the contracts without the shadow of a doubt. Why, he is hand-in-glove with Secretary Yoshisada Udonno, of the army. The Japanese fool thinks Grant is the soul of honesty, and the cleverest youth in Japan besides.”

Ralph leaned forward in his chair, and pondered deeply for a moment. Then, tapping the desk with his fingers, he said, slowly, and with emphasis:

"I understand the case now. It means a matter of thousands of pounds to us, and we must secure the contract, come what will. If these Manning boys stand in our way we must break them, that's all. One thing, we have a good ally in Willis Round. With him as——"

He was suddenly interrupted by a sound at the door. Before either could move it was thrown open, admitting a tall, thin man, carrying a much-worn Gladstone bag. Behind him and almost at his heels was Nattie Manning, an expression of determination upon his handsome face.

CHAPTER VII.

NATTIE CARRIES HIS POINT.

When Nattie left his brother and Mori in the office of Black & Company, it was with the determination to ascertain whether the tall, thin man with the Gladstone bag was really the late bookkeeper, Willis Round.

If the lad had been asked why he was placing himself to so much trouble for such a purpose he could not have answered.

There was no reason why Round should not return to Yokohama if he so minded. And he had every right to remove his whiskers if he chose to do so; and again, there was no law to prevent him from calling upon the firm of Black & Company.

Still, in view of recent circumstances, it seemed suspicious to Nattie, and he sped down the street with the firm resolve to prove the identity at once. As the reader may have conjectured, the younger Manning brother had a strong will of his own.

It was his claim, not uttered boastfully, that when he set a task unto himself, he generally carried it out if the

thing was possible. He proved that characteristic in his nature in the present instance.

On reaching the corner of the next street, which happened to be the broad thoroughfare running at right angles from the Bund, he caught sight of his man in the door of a famous tea house much frequented by the good people of Yokohama.

The fellow had paused, and was glancing back as if suspicious of being followed. On seeing Nattie, he turned quickly and disappeared into the tea house. When the lad reached the entrance, he found the front room untenanted save by a group of waiter girls.

They greeted his appearance with the effusive welcome of their class, but he brushed them aside with little ceremony and passed on into the next apartment. This also was empty. The more imposing tea houses of Japan are generally two-story structures, divided into a multitude of small and large rooms.

The one in question contained no less than a round dozen on the ground floor, and as many in the second story. There was no central hall, but simply a series of public rooms extending from front to rear, with private apartments opening on each side.

Nattie had visited the place times out of mind, and he knew that an exit could be found in the rear which led

through a small garden to a gate, opening upon a back street. The fact caused the lad to hasten his steps.

While hurrying through the fourth apartment, he heard voices in a side room. They were not familiar, but he halted at once. Suppose Round—if it were he—should take it into his head to enter one of the private apartments? He could easily remain concealed until a sufficient time had elapsed, and then go his way unseen.

For a brief moment Nattie stood irresolute. If he remained to question the *matsumas* it would give the evident fugitive time to escape by the rear gate. And if he hurried through the garden and out into the back street, Round could leave by the main entrance.

“Confound it! I can’t stay here twirling my thumbs,” he exclaimed. “What shall it be, back gate or a search through the blessed shanty? I’ll leave it to chance.”

Thrusting a couple of fingers into a vest pocket, he extracted an American quarter, and flipped it into the air.

“Heads, I search these rooms; tails, I go out the back gate,” he murmured, catching the descending coin with great dexterity.

“Tails it is. Here goes, and may I have luck,” he added.

Hurrying through the remaining apartments, he vanished into the garden just as a tall, thin man carrying a

Gladstone bag cautiously opened a side door near where Nattie had juggled the coin. There was a bland smile upon the fellow's face, and he waved one hand airily after the youth.

"Ta, ta, Master Manning," he muttered. "I am thankful to you for leaving the decision to a piece of money. It was a close call for me, as I do not care to have my identity guessed just at present. Now that the coast is clear, I'll drop in on the Blacks again and tell them to be careful."

Making his way to the main entrance, he called a passing *'rikisha* and ordered the *karumaya* to carry him to the Bund through various obscure streets. In the meantime, Nattie had left the garden by way of the rear gate. A hurried glance up and down the narrow thoroughfare resulted in disappointment.

A search of adjacent streets produced nothing. Considerably crestfallen, the lad returned to the tea house and questioned the head of the establishment. He speedily learned to his chagrin that the man for whom he had been searching had left the place not five minutes previously.

"Just my luck," he murmured, petulantly. "Here, Komatsu, give this to a beggar; it's a hoodoo."

The affable manager accepted the ill-omened twenty-

five cent piece with many bows and subsequently placed it among his collection of rare coins, with the inscription: "Yankee Hoodoo. Only one in Yokohama. Value, ten yen."

It was with a very disconsolate face that Nattie left the tea house on his way to the office of the new firm. He felt positive in his mind that the thin man was really Willis Round, and the actions of the fellow in slipping away so mysteriously tended to increase the lad's suspicions.

"If he cared to return to Yokohama, he could do so," he reasoned, while walking down Main Street. "It's no person's business that I can see. And if he desired to increase his ugliness by shaving off his whiskers it was his own lookout. But what I don't like is the way he sneaked out of Black's counting-room without speaking to us. He was certainly trying to avoid recognition, and that's flat.

"I wonder what he had to do with that debt?" added the lad, after a while. "He is mixed up with the Blacks in some way, and I'll wager the connection bodes ill to some one. Perhaps it is to us."

He had reached this far in his reflections when he chanced to look down a small alley leading from the main thoroughfare to a public garden. A *jinrikisha* was speeding past the outlet. The vehicle contained one man, and

in an instant Nattie recognized in him the subject of his thoughts.

To cover the distance to the garden was a brief task for the lad's nimble feet. As he emerged from the alley, however, he plumped into a couple of American man-of-war's men. The collision carried one of them into the gutter, but the other grasped wildly at his supposed assailant's collar.

He missed, but nothing daunted, the sailor started in pursuit, calling out in a husky voice at every step. In his eagerness to catch up with Willis Round, Nattie had continued his flight. The hubbub and outcry behind him soon brought him to a halt, and he faced about just as several policemen and a dozen foreigners and native citizens joined in the chase.

What the outcome would have been is hard to say had not help arrived at that opportune moment in the shape of a friend—a clerk at the legation—who suddenly appeared in the doorway of a private residence within a dozen feet of the lad.

“What is the matter, Manning?” hastily asked the newcomer.

As quick as a flash Nattie bounded past him, and closed the door just as the infuriated sailor reached the spot.

“For goodness' sake, old fellow, get me out by the



‘Nattie plumped into a couple of American man-of-war’s men. The collision carried one of them into the gutter, but the other grasped wildly at his supposed assailant’s collar.’

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back way!" breathed the lad. "I haven't time to explain now. I'll tell you all about it this afternoon. I am following a man, and I mustn't lose him. Let me out by the rear, please."

Considerably mystified, the clerk obeyed. A moment later Nattie was again speeding down a street toward the Bund. As luck would have it, he caught sight of his man at the next corner. The *jinrikisha* had stopped in front of Black & Company's office.

Hurrying ahead, the lad contrived to enter the door at the heels of the fugitive. He stepped lightly across the counting-room, and was within a foot of him when he threw open the door leading into the merchant's private office.

At sight of them both Ralph and his father sprang to their feet. Totally unsuspecting of the proximity of his pursuer, the tall, thin man tossed his portmanteau upon a chair, and was on the point of greeting the occupants of the office when he saw them looking behind him in evident surprise.

He turned, gave Nattie one startled glance, then made an involuntary movement as if contemplating flight. The lad barred the way, however. Grinning triumphantly, he lifted his hat with a polite bow, and said:

"Why, this is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Round. I

did not know you had returned to Yokohama. How is everything in London?"

"What are you talking about?" growled the fellow. "I don't know you."

"Indeed! How poor your memory must be. You worked for my father as confidential clerk and bookkeeper for many years. Surely you must remember his son, Nattie Manning?"

The mocking tone caused Round to frown darkly. He saw that further denial was useless. Curtly turning his back to Nattie, he stalked to a chair and sat down. During this little byplay Ralph had been staring at the intruder in a peculiarly malevolent manner.

"What do you want in here?" he demanded, at last. "This is our private office, and we receive people by invitation only. Get out."

"With the greatest pleasure," sweetly replied Nattie. "I have secured all that I desire. I wanted to satisfy myself as to that man's identity, and I have succeeded. The removal of one's whiskers don't always form an effectual disguise, you know. Ta! ta!"

He left the office with a triumphant smile, and quickly made his way to the counting-room of the new firm. Grant and Mori were engrossed in drawing up several

tables of import orders, but they gave instant attention to his story.

"It certainly proves one thing," remarked the lame youth. "Mr. Willis Round attempted to visit Yokohama in disguise. Now what can be his reason?"

Before either Nattie or Mori could reply, the front door was thrown open, and the very man they were discussing stepped into the office. There was an expression of cordial good nature upon his face, and he advanced with one hand extended in a friendly attitude.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE CONSPIRATOR DEFEATED.

“How do you do, Master Grant? I am pleased to see you,” exclaimed the newcomer. “And Master Nattie here is still the same good-looking lad as of old. Is this the new member of the firm? The old company has called in native blood, eh? Well, it is not a bad idea.”

Disregarding the cold stare of surprise given him by Grant, the speaker seated himself in a comfortable chair and gazed blandly around the office. He was a man of extreme attenuation of features, and restless, shifting eyes. He was modestly clad in a dark suit of English tweed, and carried the conventional cane of bamboo.

For a moment there was an awkward silence, then Nattie laughed—a short, curt laugh, which brought a perceptible flush to Round’s sunken cheeks.

“So you are our old bookkeeper after all?” said the lad, with a sly wink at Mori.

“Yes, I am inclined to believe so,” replied the visitor, airily. “I have an explanation to make about that little incident, my boy. D’ye see, I returned from London by way of India yesterday morning. I had my reasons for

arriving incog., therefore I denied myself to you this afternoon. As the cat is out of the bag now, I'll tell you all about it."

He paused and glanced at his auditors. Nothing daunted by their evident coldness, he resumed, in the same light manner :

"I had a little deal on with the government here and certain people in England, and I came over to push it through. Remembering the firm of Black & Company, I went to them first. The interview was not satisfactory, however. Hearing that you had resumed your father's business. I lost no time in coming here. Am I right in believing that you are open for valuable contracts?"

Both Nattie and Mori instinctively left the conversation to Grant. In a matter of business, he was the proper person, they well knew. The lame youth leaned back in his chair, and eyed the visitor with extreme gravity.

"So you are here to do business with us, Mr. Round?" he asked, slowly.

"Yes."

"May I ask the nature of the contracts?"

The ex-bookkeeper arose to his feet and walked with catlike steps to the front door. Opening it slightly, he peered forth. Then he repeated the performance at the remaining doors and windows. Evidently satisfied, he re-

turned to the desk. Bending over, he said, in a stage whisper :

“Government.”

“Yes, I know,” exclaimed Grant, impatiently. “You said that before. But for what class of articles?”

“Arms and ammunition, my boy. I have inside information. I know that Japan will be at war with China before the end of the year. I also know that the government intends to place an order for many millions of cartridges and hundreds of thousands of rifles and revolvers within a very short time.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes. Now, I represent two firms—one English and one German, and we wish to secure a resident agent in Japan. I can recommend you to them, and I will on one condition.”

“What is it?” asked Grant, drumming nervously upon the desk.

Nattie leaned forward in evident expectancy. He knew that the drumming was an ominous sign on his brother’s part, and that a climax was impending.

“I wish to remain in Yokohama, and I desire a situation. If you will give me the same position I formerly occupied in this office, I will secure you the good will of my firms. What do you say?”

Grant selected a letter from a pile on the desk and glanced over it. He smiled as if particularly well pleased at something, and then asked in a suave voice:

“When did you leave London, Mr. Round?”

“Why—er—on the second of last month.”

“And when did you reach that city after leaving my father’s service?”

“What the deuce?—I mean, about two months later. Why do you ask these questions?”

“Then you have been away from Japan for some time?”

“Of course. I could not be in London and in this country very well,” replied Round, with a sickly smile.

“It is certainly strange,” remarked Grant, reading the letter again. “Have you a twin brother, sir?”

At this apparently preposterous query, the visitor lost his affability.

“No, I haven’t,” he almost shouted. “Mr. Manning, I did not come here to lose valuable time in answering silly questions. I have made you a proposition in good faith. Will you please give me a reply?”

“So you wish to enter our employ as bookkeeper?”

“Yes.”

“And if we engage you we can become the agents of your English and German firms in this matter of the government contracts?”

"Yes, yes."

Grant arose from his chair, and leaning one hand upon the desk, he added, impressively :

"Will you also promise to clear up the mystery of the Black debt, Mr. Round?"

Nattie and Mori, who were keenly watching the visitor's face, saw him pale to the very lips. He essayed to speak, but the words refused to come. Finally regaining his composure by a violent effort, he replied, huskily :

"I don't understand you, Grant. What mystery do you mean?"

"You know very well, sir."

The lame youth's voice was sharp and cutting. Nervously wiping his face, Mr. Round glanced down at the floor, then cast a furtive glance at his companions. If ever guilt rested in a man's actions, it did then with those of the ex-bookkeeper. He probably recognized the futility of his chances, as he started to leave without further words. He was not to escape so easily, however.

"You have not heard my answer to your proposition," called out Grant, with sarcasm. "I'll tell you now that we would not have you in this office if you paid us a bonus of a thousand pounds. You had better return to your confederates, Black & Company, and inform them that their effort to place a spy in this office has failed."

"You will regret these words," retorted Round, with a muttered oath. "I'll show you that you are not so smart as you think."

"Have a care, sir," replied the lame youth. "Perhaps we will be able to prove your connection with that debt swindle, and send you up for it."

"Bah! You are a fool to——"

He did not finish the sentence. At that juncture, Nattie, who had been quietly edging his way across the office, bounded forward. There was a brief struggle, a crash at the door, and suddenly the visitor found himself in the street, considerably the worse for the encounter.

"That's the proper way to get rid of such callers," remarked the lad, cheerfully. "Talk is all right in its place, but actions are necessary at times. What a scoundrel he is!"

"He is a discovered villain," said Mori, quaintly. "In the expressive language of the American street gamin, 'We are on to him.' He was evidently sent here by the Blacks as a spy. By the way, what was in that letter?"

Grant laughed, and tossed the document to the young Japanese.

"It was simply a bluff. I had an idea the man had not

left the country, so I pretended to read a letter giving that information. He bit beautifully."

"One thing is certain," remarked Mori, with a shrug of his shoulders. "We have made an implacable enemy."

"What's the difference?" chimed in Nattie. "The more the merrier. We need not fear anything from Willis Round. He's a dead duck now."

"So Black & Company have wind of the impending contracts, eh?" mused Grant. "I must run up and see Secretary Udonno at once. I think I can prove to him that we are worthy of the contracts. Nattie, take this advertisement and have it inserted in all the foreign and native papers. Tell them to place it on the first page in display type. We'll let the world know that we are ready for business."

"I'll call on several old friends of my father in the morning and bid for the next tea and rice crop," said Mori, jotting down the items in his notebook. "How much can we use this quarter?"

"All we can secure," was the prompt reply. "I intend to cable our American houses at once. The New York and San Francisco firms are good for two shiploads at the very least. By the way, Nattie, while you are out just drop in on Saigo Brothers and see what they have on

hand in lacquered novelties. Speak for a good order to go on the steamer of the tenth."

During the next two hours the three members of the new firm were head and ears in business. Grant was in his element, and Mori seemed to like the routine also. But Nattie presently yawned, and left on his errands. Outdoor life was evidently more to his taste.

In the press of work the incidents connected with the visit of Willis Round were forgotten. Grant and Mori labored at the office until almost midnight. After attending to the advertisements Nattie inspected the company's "go down," or warehouse, and made preparations for the receiving of tea.

The following day was spent in the same manner, and on the second morning the purchases of the firm began to arrive. By noon Manning Brothers & Okuma were the talk of Yokohama. Grant's popularity and business reputation secured him a warm welcome in the trade.

A force of native clerks was installed in the office under charge of an expert foreign bookkeeper. It was finally decided to assign the drumming up of trade to Grant, and the interior buying and selling to Mori. Nattie was to have charge of the shipping and the care of the warehouse.

The latter found time, however, to practice for the coming wrestling match on the seventh of July. He had secured the services of a retired wrestler, and was soon in great form. As can be expected, he awaited the eventful day with growing impatience.

CHAPTER IX.

DISASTER THREATENS.

Grant Manning was a youth wise beyond his years. His continued ill health and his physical frailty kept him from mixing with the lads of his age. The seclusion drove him to self-communion and study. As a general rule, persons suffering from physical deformity or lingering sickness are compensated by an expansion of mind.

It is the proof of an immutable law. The blinding of one eye increases the strength of the other. The deaf and dumb are gifted with a wonderful sense of touch. Those with crippled legs are strong of arm. The unfortunates with brains awry are endowed with muscles of power.

In Grant's case his intellect made amends for his deformity of body. He loved commercial work, and the several years passed in the counting-room under his father's *régime* had made him a thorough master of the business.

When orders commenced to find their way to the new firm he was in his element. As I have stated before, he had many friends in Yokohama and the capital, Tokio, and the native merchants made haste to open trade with

him. To aid this prosperity, was the fact that no stain rested upon the firm of John Manning & Company.

The very name was synonymous with honesty, integrity and merit. Foreign houses established in Eastern countries too often treat their customers as uncivilized beings destined to be tricked in trade. John Manning had never entertained such an unwise policy, and his sons now felt the results.

The announcements in the various papers brought an avalanche of contracts and orders. On the fourth day after the birth of the new firm, Mori—who was really a shrewd, far-seeing youth—had secured the cream of the tea and rice crop. He was also promised the first bid for silks.

On his part, Grant had secured a satisfactory interview with the secretary of war in regard to the army contracts for arms and ammunition. Business was literally booming, and every foreign importing firm in Yokohama felt the new competition.

It is not to be supposed that they would permit the trade to slip away without an effort to retain it. Not the least of those disturbed was the firm of Black & Company, as can well be imagined. The merchant and Ralph were wild with rage and despair. Orders from various Eng-

lish houses were on file for early tea and rice, but the market was empty. Mori had been the early bird.

"If this continues we will have to close our doors," exclaimed Mr. Black, gloomily. "I could not buy a dozen boxes of tea this morning, and we have an order of three hundred to leave by to-morrow's steamer. The fiend take that crippled whelp! He is here, there, and everywhere, and the natives in town are begging for his trade."

"He will make a pretty penny raising the prices too," replied his son, in the same tone. "Why, he and that Japanese fool have made a regular corner in rice."

"But he is not going to increase the price, if rumor speaks the truth. Although he has control of the crop, he ships it to America at the old rates."

"That is a shrewd move," acknowledged Ralph, reluctantly. "It will make him solid with every firm in the United States. What is the matter with all of the old merchants, eh? Fancy a man like you letting a boy get the best of him in this manner. If I was the head of an established house and had gray hairs like you I'd quit the business."

This brutal speech caused the merchant to flush angrily. He was on the point of retorting, but he checked himself and remained buried in thought for some time. His reflections were bitter. It was humiliating to think that a

firm of boys should step in and steal the trade from men who had spent years in the business.

The brow of the merchant grew dark. He would not stand it. If fair means could not avail, he would resort to foul. His conscience, long deadened by trickery, formed no bar to his resolution. Striking the desk with his open hand, he exclaimed:

“I will do it no matter what comes.”

“What’s up now, dad?” asked Ralph, with a show of interest. He added, sneeringly: “Are you awakening from your ‘Rip Van Winkle’ sleep? Do you think it is time to get up and circumvent those fools? Name your plan, and I will give you my help with the greatest pleasure.”

“You can assist me. We must destroy the credit of the new firm. They have a working capital of only twelve or thirteen thousand dollars. I learned this morning that they had given notes for ninety days for twice that amount of money. It is also said that the firm of Takatsuna & Company has sold them ten thousand dollars’ worth of tea at sight. Grant arranged for an overdraw with a native bank inside of an hour. Now if we can get up a scare, Takatsuna will come down on the bank for his money, and the bank will call on the Mannings for it.”

"That is a great scheme," said Ralph, admiringly. "We will try it at once."

"Go to Round's hotel and bring him here. In the meantime I will finish the details, my son. If all goes well, that cripple and his brother will be paupers before night."

"And we will be able to fill our orders by to-morrow at the latest. If Manning Brothers & Okuma fail, the dealers will gladly come to us."

"I do not care a snap of a finger for the tea business," replied Mr. Black, contemptuously. "It is that army contract I am after. I have been told that Grant has had an interview with the secretary. Now, if we don't kill the firm they will have the plum as sure as death. Bring Round here without delay."

Ralph laughed as he walked to the door.

"Willis has been in the sulks since he failed to carry out our little scheme of placing him in the Manning counting-room as a spy. He hates them worse than ever. He will prove a valuable ally in the present plan."

In the course of an hour he returned with the ex-bookkeeper. Before noon strange rumors commenced to circulate among the foreign merchants and the banks. By one o'clock the native houses were agog with the news. Men met on the Bund and talked over the startling intel-

ligence. At two a representative from the firm of Takatsuna called at the office of Manning Brothers & Okuma.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but my firm is in pressing need of money. It is short notice, I acknowledge, but we must have the ten thousand dollars you owe us for tea at once."

Grant looked surprised, but he politely sent the representative to the Yokohama bank where the check had been negotiated. In half an hour an urgent call came from the bank for the senior member of the firm. When Grant returned to the office his face wore an anxious expression.

"Boys, our enemies are at work," he said. "It is said on 'Change that we are pinched for funds. Black & Company are urging the native merchants to ask for their bills. The bank paid Takatsuna their money, but the directors want it refunded at once."

He had hardly ceased speaking before a knock sounded at the door of the private office. Nattie opened it, giving admission to a portly Japanese. The newcomer's dress was disordered, and he appeared wild with anxiety. It was the president of the Yokohama bank.

At his heels were several merchants and half a dozen reporters. Ill news travels fast. Regardless of ceremony, the visitors crowded into the office. Grant's face became set, and his eyes glittered. Nattie appeared highly

amused. He saw the comical side of the invasion, not the serious.

It was really a critical moment. In commercial circles there is nothing more disastrous and credit-snapping than a run on a bank, or the failure to promptly pay a bill. The standing of a new firm is always uncertain. Like gold, it requires time and a trial in the fire of experience.

Grant realized the danger at once. As the newcomers surged into the office, he arose from the desk and grasped the back of his chair with a clutch of despair. His thoughts traveled fast. He saw the ruin of his hopes, the success of his enemies; and he almost groaned aloud.

Outwardly he was calm, however. Politely greeting the president of the bank, he asked the nature of his business. With feverish hands, the man produced a paper, and requested the payment of the ten thousand dollars.

"Remember, my dear sir, I am first on the spot," he said.

The words were significant. It meant a call for money from all creditors. It meant the swamping of their credit and absolute failure. Preserving his calmness, Grant picked up the firm's check-book, and glanced over the stubs.

Of the twenty thousand dollars paid in by Mori, but a trifle over one-half remained. There were other creditors

at the door. To pay one meant a demand from the others. To refuse the payment of the bank's debt was to be posted as insolvent. That meant ruin.

Sick at heart, Grant was on the point of adopting the latter course, when there came a sudden and most unexpected change in the state of affairs.

CHAPTER X.

MORI SHOWS HIS GENEROSITY.

During the scene in the private office of the firm Mori had remained silent and apparently indifferent. Apparently only—those who knew him best would have augured from the appearance of the two bright red spots in his dark cheeks that he was intensely interested.

He watched the movements of the crowd at the door, he listened to the demand of the bank president, and he noted Grant's struggle to appear calm. Then just as the lame youth turned from the check-book to his auditors with an announcement of their failure to pay trembling upon his lips, the young Japanese introduced himself into the proceedings.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" he asked the president, sharply. "What do you wish?"

"I am here for my money," was the defiant reply. "I have presented the note, and I await payment."

"Don't you think this is rather sudden?" asked Mori, with a suspicious calmness in his voice. "It was negotiated but yesterday. Why this haste?"

"I want my money," was the only answer vouchsafed.

"And you at the door," continued the Japanese youth, turning his gaze in that direction. "Are you here for the same reason?"

Some one in the rear rank replied in the affirmative.

Mori's eyes flashed. Taking a private check-book from his pocket, he rapidly wrote several lines therein, and, detaching a leaf, tossed it to Grant.

"Pay them, every one," he said, carelessly. "You will find that sufficient, I think."

The lame youth eagerly read the check, and then his face became suffused with emotion. The amount called for was thirty thousand dollars! Mori had placed his whole fortune to the firm's account! Afraid to trust his voice, Grant hobbled over to the youthful native, and, in the presence of the whole assemblage, threw his arms around him.

"God bless you!" he exclaimed. "You are a friend and a man."

"Nonsense," replied Mori, gently. "It is nothing. Pay these cattle off, and put them down in your black book. Pay them in full and rid the office of the mob for good. And, understand," he added, addressing the bank president and his companions, "we will have no further dealings with you. Hereafter we will trade with men not liable to scare at the slightest rumor."

The official took the check extended him by Grant with a crestfallen air. He saw that he had made a mistake and had lost the business of the new firm. Too late he recalled the fact that he had really heard nothing of moment. Rumors had been circulated, but try as he would, he could not recollect their source.

The remaining creditors also suffered a revulsion of feeling. Some attempted to slink away, but the three members of the firm singled them out one by one, and compelled them to accept checks for the amount of their bills.

In an hour eighteen thousand dollars had been paid out, but the credit of the firm was saved. When the last man had been sent away Nattie and Grant overwhelmed the clever young Japanese with congratulations and heartfelt thanks. Mori's modesty equaled his generosity, and he threatened them with immediate dissolution if they did not refrain.

"It is nothing, my friends," he exclaimed, for the hundredth time. "I am only glad that I was able to furnish the money."

"You must withdraw the entire amount just as soon as it is available," insisted Grant. "We should hear from the American houses within five weeks, and then we will return to the old basis."

"I would like to have a photograph of old Black's face when he hears the news," said Nattie, with a grin. "Or, better still, overhear his comments."

"It was a shrewd trick, but it failed, I am glad to say," remarked the lame youth. "We must take advantage of the opportunity and clinch the effect. Now is the time to set our credit upon a solid foundation."

Taking several sheets of paper, he scribbled half a dozen lines upon them.

"Nattie, take these to the different newspaper offices, and have them inserted in to-morrow's issues," he said. "Then drop in at the printing office and tell Bates to work up a thousand posters to be displayed about town. How does this sound?"

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN :

"A despicable attempt having been made this day by certain interested parties to injure the credit of the undersigned firm, notice is hereby given that all outstanding bills will be settled in full at ten A. M. to-morrow. A reward of one thousand *yen* is also offered for information leading to the conviction of the person or persons starting the slander.

"MANNING BROTHERS & OKUMA.'"

"That is just the thing!" exclaimed Mori. "It could not be better. We'll have the posters distributed broadcast over Yokohama and also Tokio. Make it five in-

stead of one thousand, Grant. Really, I believe that little affair will do us a great deal of good. It is an excellent advertisement."

Nattie hurried away to the printing office, and by night the two cities were reading the posters. At ten o'clock the following morning fully two score merchants had called upon the firm, but they came to ask for trade, not to present bills.

The conspiracy had resolved itself into a boomerang, and the firm of Manning Brothers & Okuma was more prosperous than ever. Black & Son were correspondingly depressed. The failure of their latest scheme caused the elder merchant much humiliation. At a meeting held in his office, attended by Ralph and Mr. Round, it was resolved to stick at nothing to defeat the enemy.

"It is war to the knife now," exclaimed the head of the firm, grinding his teeth. "Something must be done before the first of next month, as the army contracts will be awarded then."

"And that means a little trifle of twenty thousand pounds, eh?" replied the ex-bookkeeper, softly rubbing his hands.

"Yes, one hundred thousand dollars. That is clear profit."

"Many a man would commit murder for less than that,"

mused Ralph, absently stabbing the arm of his chair with a penknife.

Mr. Black gave his son a keen glance.

"Yes," he said, in a peculiar tone. "Whole families have been put out of the way for as many cents. But," he added, hastily, "there is no such question in our case. Ha! ha! the idea is simply preposterous!"

His companions echoed the laugh, but in a strained fashion. Ralph continued to stare moodily at the floor. After a while Willis Round announced that he had a proposition to make.

"You said a few moments ago that it was war to the knife now," he commenced.

"Yes."

"It is to your interest to ruin the new firm before the awarding of the army contracts, eh?"

"Certainly. If they are in business by the end of the present month they will secure the valuable contracts without a doubt."

"What would you give if they were rendered unable to bid for them?"

The merchant stared at his questioner half contemptuously.

"Why do you ask? You do not think you could ruin them single-handed?" he asked, banteringly.

"Never you mind," was the dogged reply. "Answer my question. What would you give if the contracts were placed in your way?"

"Twenty per cent. of the profits and our assistance in any scheme you may propose. Do you really mean to say that you have a plan promising success?"

The merchant left his chair in his eagerness and approached the ex-bookkeeper. Ralph showed a renewed interest also. Before replying, Round cautiously opened the door leading into the counting-room. After satisfying himself, he talked long and earnestly to his companions. At the conclusion the faces of the merchant and his son were expressive of the liveliest satisfaction. There was trouble still in store for the new firm of Manning Brothers & Okuma.

CHAPTER XI.

NATTIE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

During the important and engrossing events of the past few days Nattie had not forgotten the sport promised for the seventh of the month. He was passionately fond of athletics, and he never let slip an opportunity to participate in all that came his way.

Extensive preparations had been made for the celebration of the treaty made by Commodore Perry in the year 1853. Not only the foreign residents were to take part, but the natives themselves promised a great *matsura*, or festival.

The committee of the Yokohama Club, under whose auspices it was to take place, had secured the racing grounds upon the bluff. A varied programme had been arranged to cover the entire day. The sports had been divided into two parts, modern racing and games in the forenoon, and ancient native ceremonies after tiffin.

The main feature of the latter was to be a grand wrestling match between foreigners. To add to the interest, the competitors were to remain unknown to each other until the moment of their appearance in the ring.

Nattie had given in his name among the first. The prize offered was a valuable medal and a crown of laurel. For several days the lad had devoted his idle hours to practice with a retired native wrestler. The evening before the seventh he was in fine fettle.

As an added chance, however, he resolved to take one more lesson from his instructor—a final bout to place him in good trim for the morrow. The scene of the practice matches was in the large “go-down,” or warehouse, of the firm, located near a canal separating the bluff from the native quarter.

The appointment for the evening was at nine, and shortly before that hour Nattie left a tea house on his way to the place of destination. The day had been sultry, and toward nightfall threatening clouds gathered over the bay.

Rain promised, but that fact did not deter the lad. As his *'rikisha* sped along the Bund he recalled the points already taught him by his master in the art of wrestling, and he fancied the ringing of cheers and the outburst of plaudits were already greeting him.

The Manning “go-down” was a large square structure of stone, with iron shutters and massive doors. It was considered fireproof, and had as a watchman a brawny Irishman recently paid off from a sailing ship. His name

was Patrick Cronin, and he claimed to be an American by naturalization.

On reaching the entrance Nattie looked around for the fellow, but he was not in sight. Taking a key from his pocket, he opened a narrow door leading into a little corner office. As he passed inside there came a wild gust of wind and a downpour of rain. The storm had burst.

"Good job I arrived in time," muttered the lad. "Whew! how it does pour down. Looks as if it has started in for three or four hours at least. If it keeps on I needn't expect old Yokoi. I wonder where Patrick is?"

He whistled shrilly and thumped upon the floor with his cane, but only the echoes came to his ears. After a moment of thought he lighted a lantern and sat down near a window opening upon a narrow alley running between the building and the canal.

The absence of the watchman was certainly strange. It was his duty to report at the "go-down" at six o'clock. In fact, Nattie had seen him that very evening. The building was full of valuable silks, teas, and lacquered ware, intended for shipment on the following day.

Thieves were rampant along the canal, several daring robberies having occurred during the past week. Then again there was always the danger of fire. As the lad

sat in his chair and thought over the possible results of the Irishman's dereliction, he grew thoroughly indignant.

"By George! he'll not work for us another day," he muttered, giving the stick a vicious whirl. "I'll wager a *yen* he is in some groggery at this very moment drinking with a chance shipmate."

Going to the door he glanced out into the night. The rain was still descending in torrents, and it was of that steadiness promising a continuation. When Nattie returned to his seat it was with the resolution to keep guard over the firm's property himself.

It meant a long and lonely watch with naught save the beating of the rain, the dreary gloom of the interior, and the murmuring sounds from the nearby bay for company. The lad had a stout heart, however, and he settled himself for the vigil without more ado.

He found comfort in the anticipation of a scene with the recreant watchman in the morning. He made up his mind even to refuse him admission if he returned to the "go down" that night. The minutes dragged slowly, and at last the watcher found himself nodding.

"Jove! this won't do," he exclaimed, springing from his chair. "I am as bad as Patrick. The lantern is going out also. Wonder if I have any matches in my pocket?"

He searched, but without favorable results. A hasty

examination revealed the unwelcome fact that the oil receptacle was empty. In another moment the light flickered and died out, leaving the little office in darkness.

Disturbed in spirit, Nattie went to the door, almost inclined to visit some neighboring warehouse or shop for oil and matches. One glance at the deluge still falling drove the idea from his head. He was without umbrella or rain coat, and to venture for even a short distance would mean a thorough drenching—something to be religiously avoided in Japan during the summer season.

“Heigho! I am in for it, I suppose. Confound that Irishman! I would like to punch his empty noddle for this. Here I am in the dark, condemned to remain all night without sleep, and—by jingo!”

A very sudden and painful thought had occurred to the lad. The morrow was the day upon which he was to shine as a wrestler! The seventh of July; the day of sports in celebration of Commodore Perry’s treaty.

“I’ll be fit for athletics and wrestling matches if I stay around here and lose my sleep!” murmured Nattie, ruefully. “Why, I’ll be all played out, and a five-year-old boy could throw me. But what in thunder can I do? I can’t leave and run the risk of the place catching fire. There’s more than twenty thousand dollars’ worth of

stuff in here, and it would be just nuts to a thief to find himself among all those silks."

It was impossible to communicate with either Grant or Mori. The streets in the warehouse district were unfrequented, and in such a violent storm even the policemen would hie themselves to a convenient shelter. Muttering maledictions upon the head of the absent watchman, Nattie closed the door and returned to his seat near the window.

Occasional flashes of lightning illuminated the outside, and during one of these the lad espied a man crossing the bridge at the corner of the building. Thinking it might be some kindly person who would not disdain to carry a message, he hurried to the door leading into the street.

As he opened it he heard voices. The newcomer had paused and was looking back at the indistinct figure of a second man on the other side of the canal. In the intervals of light Nattie observed the person nearest him start back and evidently expostulate with his follower.

They were barely ten yards away, and by the aid of a brilliant flash of lightning the lad noticed something familiar in the appearance of both men. One was tall and thin, while the other had a short, stumpy form and a rolling lurch as he wavered vaguely near the end of the bridge.

"Get back, man. What do you want to come out in this wet for when you have a cozy nook in yon house? Go back, I say."

It was the attenuated individual who had spoken. He placed one hand upon his companion's arm, but the fellow staggered away and replied:

"Got—hic—my dooty ter do. Oi'm too long away as 'tis, m' boy. Dash ther—hic—rain. It ain't wetter in th' blooming ocean, knife me if 'tis."

"You are a fool to come out in it, I say. Return to the house, and I'll join you presently. There are three more bottles of prime stuff in the closet. Break one out and help yourself."

"But me dooty, man! It has never been said that—hic—Pat Cronin ever went back on a job. Ask me ship-mates. Why, they sing er song about me:

"So he seized th' capstan bar,
Like a true honest tar,
And in spite or tears and sighs
Sung yo! heave ho!"

"Shut up; you will have the police after us," expostulated the other. "Do you intend to return to the house, or shall I lock up the bottles? Answer me, yes or no?"

"Sure and Oi don't want to lose th' drink, but——"

"Yes, or no?"

“Ah, it’s th’ funny man ye are. He! he! he! Phwy don’t yer git fat? If Oi——”

“Then it is ‘no,’ eh? Well, here——”

“Hould an, me buck. Oi’ll go back and take another swig. Then to me dooty, yer understand. Here goes.

“‘So he seized th’ (hic) capstan bar,
Like a true honest tar,
And in spite of——’”

The husky notes died away, a door slammed in one of a row of wooden shanties across the bridge, and all was quiet. The tall, thin man glanced keenly after his companion; then, slipping up to the Manning “go-down,” he examined the entrance. It was locked. Inserting a key he soon gained admission. As he softly closed the door again he stood within a pace of Nattie.

It had not taken the lad many seconds to catch the drift of affairs. He knew full well that Patrick’s tempter was no other than Willis Round, the firm’s ex-bookkeeper. His presence in that locality during a heavy storm, his familiarity with the recreant watchman, the evident and successful attempt to entice him away from his post, could have only one meaning.

He had designs on the property of his enemies.

Long before Patrick had lurched back to the shanty Nattie had slipped into the office. When he heard the

key grating in the lock he was not surprised; but he was considerably puzzled as to the best manner in which he should treat the situation.

“If I only had my revolver I would bring the scoundrel to terms,” he muttered, regretfully. “I had to leave it home this night of all nights. As it is, I haven’t a solitary weapon. A bamboo cane wouldn’t hurt a fly. Ah, I’ll try the lantern.”

Creeping across the floor he secured the object just as the ex-bookkeeper reached the door. Returning to his post, the lad waited with rapidly beating heart.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE "GO-DOWN."

That Willis Round meant injury was plainly evident. But whether he came as a thief or incendiary was yet to be ascertained. He knew the ground well, so he lost little time in entering. After closing the door he hesitated.

At his elbow stood the brave lad with lantern raised in readiness. At the first sign of a light, or the scratch of a match, he meant to strike with all the power of his arm. The lantern was a heavy iron affair, and Willis Round was as near death at that moment as he probably had been during his eventful career.

His knowledge of the "go-down's" interior saved him. After a brief pause he started toward the main portion of the warehouse. At his heels crept Nattie, silent, determined, resolute.

The main room of the warehouse was crowded with bales of silk, chests of tea, and various boxes containing lacquered ware. These had been arranged in an orderly manner with passageways extending between the different piles.

In one thing the lad had an advantage; he was thor-

oughly conversant with the arrangement of the goods, while Round had only a general knowledge of the interior. The latter stumbled several times, but he made no move to show a light.

Presently Nattie felt his curiosity aroused. What could be the man's object? Was it theft of valuable silks or deliberate incendiarism? That the fellow had a certain destination in view was made evident by his actions.

During the day the place was lighted by large glazed windows at the ends and on each side, but at night these were closed with iron shutters. In the roof were several long skylights, and through them an occasional glare came from the lightning, which still fitfully shot athwart the sky.

It was by the aid of one of these that the lad finally saw the intruder halt near a pile of tea chests. The flash lasted only an instant, but it brought out in clear relief the attenuated figure of the scoundrel. He was standing within reach of a number of boxes packed ready for shipment on the morrow.

They were wrapped in straw matting, and nearby was a little heap of the same material to be used on other chests. It was highly inflammable. This fact recurred to the lad with startling significance, and he involuntarily hurried forward.

Before he could realize his mistake he was within a step of Round. A slight cough from the latter caused Nattie to abruptly check himself. With a gasp of excitement he shrank back, and slipped behind a large bale of silks.

The next moment a blinding flash of lightning revealed the interior of the warehouse. Before it died away the plucky lad peered forth, but only to find that a change had taken place in affairs. The ex-bookkeeper was not in sight.

It was an unwelcome discovery, to say the least. With the enemy in view, it was easy to keep track of his intentions. Now he might be retreating to any part of the vast "go-down" where in temporary security he could start a conflagration at his leisure.

"I must find him at all hazards," muttered Nattie, somewhat discomfited. "Why didn't I bring matters to a point in the office? or why didn't I strike him down while I had the chance a moment ago? I'll not fool any more."

Grasping the iron lantern in readiness for instant use, he slipped forward step by step. At every yard he paused and listened intently. The silence was both oppressive and ominous. He would have given a great deal if even a rustle or a sigh had reached his ears.

As time passed without incident the lad grew bolder. His anxiety spurred him on. He hastened his movements and peered from side to side in vain endeavor to pierce the gloom. Where had the man gone? Probably he was even then preparing to strike the match that would ignite the building.

Unable to endure longer the suspense, Nattie swung into a side aisle and ran plump into some yielding object. There was a muttered cry of surprise and terror; then, in the space of a second, the interior resounded with shouts and blows and the hubbub of a struggle.

At the very start Nattie lost his only weapon. In the sudden and unexpected collision the lantern was dashed from his hand. Before he could recover it he felt two sinewy arms thrown about his middle, then with a tug he was forced against a bale.

It required only a moment for the athletic lad to free himself. Long training at sports and games came to his aid. Wriggling toward the floor, he braced himself and gave a mighty upward heave. At the same time, finding his arms released, he launched out with both clinched fists.

There was a thud, a stifled cry, and then a pile of tea chests close at hand fell downward with a loud crash.

Quick to realize his opportunity, Nattie slipped away and placed a large box between his antagonist and himself.

The scrimmage had only served to increase his anxiety and anger. When he regained his breath he called out, hotly :

"You confounded scoundrel, I'll capture you yet. I know you, Willis Round, and if this night's work don't place you in prison it'll not be my fault."

The words had hardly passed his lips when the lad was unceremoniously brought to a realization of his mistake. There was a whiz and a crash and a small box dropped to the floor within a foot of him. He lost no time in shifting his position.

"Aha ! two can play at that game," he muttered.

Picking up a similar object, he was on the point of throwing it haphazard when he became aware of a loud knocking in the direction of the door. Almost frantic with relief and joy, he dropped the missile and started toward the spot.

Fortunately gaining the little apartment without mishap, he inserted his key in the lock with trembling hands, and attempted to turn it. Just then a maudlin voice came from outside :

"Phwere is the lock, Oi wonder? By the whiskers av

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St. Patrick, Oi never saw such a night. Cronin, ye divil, yer fuller than Duffy's goat. But ye are a good fellow.

" 'So Oi seized th' capstan bar,
Like a true honest tar,
And in spite——'

"Murther! Oi can't git in at all, at all. Oi'll go back to the bottle. Me new friend has—hic—left me, but Oi have his whiskey. Here goes for th' house once more."

Disgusted at the discovery that it was only the tipsy watchman, Nattie had again made his way back into the "go-down" proper. As he crossed the threshold of the door leading from the office, he heard the rattling of iron.

The sound came from the far end. A second later there was a faint crash, and a gust of wind swept through the vast apartment.

"He has opened a window. He is trying to escape."

Throwing all caution away, the lad recklessly dashed down the central passageway. It did not take him long to reach the spot. The fury of the storm caused the opened shutter to swing back and forth with a melancholy grinding of the hinges.

Climbing upon the sill, Nattie slipped through the opening and dropped outside. He had barely reached the ground when he was suddenly seized, and, with a fierce

effort, sent staggering across the walk separating the building from the canal.

He made a frantic effort to save himself, but it was too late. With a shrill cry trembling upon his lips, he felt himself falling through space ; then, with a loud splash, he struck the water's surface !

CHAPTER XIII.

WILLIS ROUND ESCAPES.

No man, or boy, for that matter, knows just what he can do until put to the test. We may think we know the limit of our strength or endurance, but we cannot prove it until an emergency arises. Then we are often found mistaken in our previous surmises, and, need it be said, much to our amazement.

Nature is a wise mother. She has provided in all a reserve force which only needs the touch of an exigency to cause it to appear full powered. A task is set before you—you cannot do it in your opinion; but you try—and succeed. You are in peril; only a miracle of strength or shrewdness will save you. Involuntarily you act, and, lo! the miracle comes from your good right arm or your brain.

A lad learning to swim places a dozen yards as the extent of his powers. He enters the water; is carried beyond his depth; swept away by an undertow, and swims successfully the length of three city blocks. It was his reserve force and the stimulating fear of death that brought him safely to shore.

When Nattie Manning felt himself falling into the canal, sent there by Willis Round's cunning arm, he realized only one emotion, and that was rage—overpowering, consuming anger. He was wild with wrath to think that he had been tricked by the ex-bookkeeper, and the flames of his passion were not lessened by discomfiture.

It seemed that he had barely touched the water before he was out, climbing hand over hand up the jagged stone side. To this day he does not know how he emerged so quickly, or by what latent force of muscle he dragged himself to the passageway.

He gained the spot, however, and, thoroughly saturated with water, set out at the top of his speed after his assailant, whose shadowy figure scurried along in front of him toward the bay. What the lad hoped to accomplish he could not well tell himself, but he continued the pursuit with the keen determination of a bloodhound.

A short distance back of the "go-down," a narrow street ran from the bluff to the center of the city. It crossed the canal with the aid of a low bridge, and was occupied by storehouses.

The storm was passing away. The rain had slackened perceptibly, and the wind had died down to occasional puffs. In the south lightning could still be seen, but it was the mere glowing of atmospheric heat.

In that part of Yokohama devoted to mercantile warehouses, the street lamps were few and far between. There was one at the junction of the bridge and passageway, however, and when Nattie dashed into its circle of illumination, he suddenly found himself confronted by a uniformed policeman.

The latter immediately stretched out his arms and brought the lad to a halt. Then drawing his short-sword, he demanded in peremptory tones the meaning of his haste. Seeing the futility of resisting the official, Nattie hurriedly made known his identity, and explained the events of the night.

Brief as was the delay, when the two started in pursuit of the fugitive, enough time had been wasted to permit him to escape. A hasty search of the neighborhood brought no results. Willis Round was out of reach.

"No matter," remarked the lad, at last. "I know him, and it won't be difficult to apprehend the scoundrel."

Returning to the "go-down" with the officer, he closed the window and then dispatched the man to the nearest messenger office with a note for Grant. In due time the police official returned with assistance. Patrick Cronin was found helplessly intoxicated in a nearby house, and unceremoniously lugged away to jail.

The lame youth was prompt in his appearance on the

scene. He brought with him a servant of the family, who was installed as watchman until the morrow. Relieved from his responsibility, Nattie accompanied his brother home, and after explaining the affair in detail, proceeded to take the rest he needed for the wrestling match of the next day.

On reporting at the office the following morning, he found Grant and Mori still discussing Willis Round's actions. A report from the police stated that nothing had been accomplished. The fugitive was still at liberty, and in all probability had left the city.

"I'll wager a *yen* he is speeding as fast as the train can carry him to either Nagasaki or Kobi," remarked Mori. "He'll try to get a ship and leave the country."

Grant shook his head doubtfully.

"In my opinion, he will not do that," he said. "There are too many places in the interior where he can hide until this affair blows over."

"If the scoundrel ever shows his face in Yokohama I'll see that he is placed behind the bars," exclaimed Nattie, vindictively. "He deserves little mercy at our hands. If an all-wise Providence had not sent me to the 'go-down' last night we would now be considerably out of pocket."

"What will we do with Patrick Cronin?"

"Discharge him; that's all. We can't prove any connection with Round. The latter simply tempted him away from his duty with a bottle of whiskey. It will be impossible to bring a criminal charge against the Irishman."

"I will see that he remains in jail for a couple of weeks, anyway," decided Grant. "He deserves some punishment."

"When shall we close up?" asked Nattie, gayly. "This is a great holiday, you know. We are due at the race track by ten."

"It's a quarter past nine now," replied the young Japanese, looking at his watch. "Suppose we start at once?"

The suggestion was acted upon with alacrity. Leaving the office in charge of a native watchman, the three youths took *jinrikishas* and proceeded to the "bluff," where the sports of the day were to take place.

The storm of the preceding night had ended in delightful weather. The tropical rays of the sun were tempered by a cooling breeze from the bay. The air was glorious with briskness, and so clear that the majestic peak of Fuji San seemed within touch.

The city was in gala attire. Banners of all nations were flaunting in the breeze, but after the Japanese flag of the Rising Sun, the grand old Stars and Stripes pre-

dominated. It could not be said that the firm of Manning Brothers & Okuma had failed in patriotism.

Streaming from a lofty flagstaff on the roof was an immense American ensign, and draping the *façade* of the building were others intertwined with the standard of the country. The streets were decorated with arches and bunting, and every second native wore a little knot of red, white and blue.

It was a unique celebration, from one point of view. Many years before, the gallant Commodore Perry had sailed into the Bay of Yokohama with a message of good will from the then President of the United States to the ruler of Japan.

At that time the island kingdom was walled in by impassable bulwarks of exclusiveness and hatred of foreigners. For thousands of years she had calmly pursued her course of life, lost to civilization, and satisfied with her reign of idols and depths of barbarism.

It required a strong hand to force a way to the central power, and time waited until the Yankee commodore appeared with his fleet of ships. Other nations had tried to pierce the barrier. England, France, Germany made repeated attempts, but were repulsed.

The Dutch secured a foothold of trade, but on the most degrading terms. Their representatives were compelled

to approach the mikado and grovel upon their knees with heads bowed in the dust. In this debasing attitude were they greeted with the contempt they deserved, and as slaves to Japan.

Much as Americans desired commercial relations with the country, they would not accept them with humility. In the selection of an envoy the United States could not have decided on a better man than Commodore Perry, brother of the hero of Lake Erie.

Firm, implacable, intelligent, and generous withal, he was the fitting choice. On reaching Japan he was met with refusals and evasions. He persisted, and finally the august ruler sent a minor official to confer with the foreigner.

"I am here as personal representative of the United States of America, and I will see no one save the mikado himself, or his highest official," replied the bluff naval officer. "I have ten ships and two hundred guns, and here I stay until I am received with the formalities due my President."

He finally won the point, and after the usual delay, a treaty was made between the two countries, to the amazement of the civilized world. This was the entering wedge which resulted in the Japan of to-day. Lifted from her barbarism, she has reached a high plane among nations.

Small wonder that her people celebrate the anniversary, and honor the memory of the immortal Commodore Perry.

With apologies for this digression, I will again take up the thread of the story.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CELEBRATION.

En route to the "bluff" the boys came upon a curious procession. As stated above, the whole town was enjoying a *matsura*, or festival. As Nattie aptly remarked, it was the Fourth of July, Decoration Day and Christmas thrown into one.

In the present case the spectacle was one calculated to make a foreigner imagine himself in the interior of Africa. Approaching the *jinrikishas* occupied by Grant and his companions was a bullock cart, upon which a raised platform and scaffolding twenty feet high had been constructed.

The bullock and all were covered with paper decorations, green boughs and artificial flowers. In front a girl with a grotesque mask danced and postured, while a dozen musicians twanged impossible instruments and kept up an incessant tattoo on drums.

On foot around the *bashi*, as the whole structure is called, were twenty or thirty lads naked as to their legs, their faces chalked, their funny little heads covered with

straw hats a yard wide, and their bodies clad in many-colored tunics, decked out with paper streamers and flowers.

In front, on all sides, behind, and even under the wheels, were scores of children marching to the tune of the band—if it could be so called—much as the youths of America do in the processions, be it circus or otherwise, in our country.

The boys forming the guard to the bullock cart marched step by step with military precision, chanting at the top of their voices, and banging upon the ground a long iron bar fitted with loose rings.

The colors, the songs, the dance and the clanging iron, formed together a combination calculated to draw the attention of every person not deaf, dumb and blind. To the boys it was a common sight, and they bade their *karu-mayas* hurry forward away from the din.

On reaching the field on the “bluff,” they found an immense throng awaiting the commencement of ceremonies. The race track had been laid out in fitting style, and innumerable booths, tents and *kiosks* filled two-thirds of the space.

The morning hours were to be devoted to ancient Japanese games, and the time after tiffin to modern sports and matches, including the event of the day, the wrestling. Mori Okuma—an athlete in both European and native

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sports—was listed in a bout at Japanese fencing, so he left his companions for a dressing-tent.

Nattie and Grant glanced over the vast concourse of people, and exchanged bows with their many friends. The Americans and English in foreign countries keep green in their memory the land of their birth, and in all places where more than one foreigner can be found a club is organized.

It is a sort of oasis in the desert of undesirable neighbors, and forms a core around which cluster good fellowship and the habits and customs of home. The Strangers' Club in Yokohama had a membership of six hundred, and they were well represented in the present assemblage.

Grant and Nattie were well-known members, and they counted their friends by the hundred. In looking over the field the latter espied a group in the grand stand which immediately attracted his attention. He pointed them out to his brother.

"There is Mr. Black and the two German merchants," he said. "They have their heads together as if discussing some weighty problem. I wonder where Ralph is? He is interested in athletics."

"I'll wager a *yen* he is about somewhere. So the Germans are hobnobbing with our esteemed enemy, eh? I'll warrant we are the subject of conversation. I don't like

the way Swartz and Bauer conduct business, and I guess they know it. They can form an alliance if they wish to. We needn't lose any sleep over it."

"There comes Ralph. He is looking in this direction. I wonder what he thinks about the failure of his confederate, Willis Round, to injure us? To the deuce with them, anyway! The fencing is about to commence."

The clapping of hands and a prolonged cheer proclaimed the beginning of the sports. The *yobidashi*, or caller-out, took his stand upon a decorated box, and announced a bout at fencing between the ever-pleasant and most worthy importing merchant, Mori Okuma, and the greatly-to-be-admired doctor-at-law, Hashimoto Choye.

At the end of this ceremonious proclamation he introduced our friend and his antagonist. Both were small in stature, and they presented rather a comical appearance. Each was padded out of all proportions with folds of felt and leather. Upon their heads were bonnet-shaped helmets of metal, and each wore a jacket of lacquered pieces decidedly uncomfortable to the eye.

At the word of command attendants rushed in with the weapons. These were not broadswords, rapiers, nor cutlasses, but a curious instrument composed of a number of strips of bamboo, skillfully wrought together and bound.

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The end was covered with a soft skin bag, and the handle was very much like that of an ordinary sword.

Armed with these the combatants faced each other, and at the sound of a mellow bell fell to with the utmost ferocity. Slash, bang, whack, went the weapons; the fencers darted here and there, feinted, prodded, cut and parried, as if they had to secure a certain number of strikes before the end of the bout.

It was all very funny to those unaccustomed to the Japanese style of fencing, and the naval officers from the various warships in port roared with laughter. To the natives it was evidently deeply interesting, and they watched the rapid play of the weapons as we do the gyrations of our favorite pitcher in the national game.

At the end of five minutes the game was declared finished. The umpire, an official of the city government, decided in favor of Mori, and that youth fled to the dressing-tent to escape the plaudits of the audience. He received the congratulations of Grant and Nattie with evident pleasure, however.

The next item on the programme was a novel race between trained storks. Then came a creeping match between a score of native youngsters, and so the morning passed with jugglery and racing and many sports of the ancient island kingdom.

At noon tiffin was served to the club and its guests in a large pavilion placed in the center of the grounds. The ceremonies recommenced at two o'clock with a running match between a dozen trained athletes. Of all the spectators, probably the happiest was Grant Manning.

Deprived of participation in the various sports by his deformity, he seemed to take a greater interest from that very fact. He clapped his hands and shouted with glee at every point, and was the first to congratulate the winners as they left the track.

The time for the great event of the day finally arrived. At three the master of ceremonies, clad in *kamishimo*, or ancient garb, mounted his stand and announced in stentorian tones :

"The next event on the programme will be a contest in wrestling between six gentlemen of this city. Those persons whose names are listed with the secretary will report in the dressing-tent."

"That calls me," cried Nattie, gayly. "Boys, bring out your rabbits' feet and your lucky coins."

"You don't know the name of your antagonist?" asked Mori.

"No; nor will I until we enter the ring. Small matter.

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I feel in fine trim, and I intend to do the best I can. So long."

"Luck with you, Nattie," called out all within hearing, casting admiring glances after the handsome, athletic lad.

Directly in front of the grand stand a ring had been constructed something after the fashion of the old-time circus ring. The surface was sprinkled with a soft, black sand, and the ground carefully leveled. Overhead stretched a canopy of matting, supported by a number of bamboo poles wrapped in red, white and blue bunting.

At the four corners of the arena were mats for the judges, and in the center an umpire in gorgeous costume took his place. By permission of the Nomino Sakune Jinsha Society, which controls the national game of wrestling in the empire, their hereditary judges were to act in the present match.

After Nattie disappeared in the dressing-tent a short delay occurred. As usual, the audience indicated their impatience with shouts and calls, and the ever-present small boy made shrill noises upon various quaint instruments.

Suddenly a herald with a trumpet emerged from the tent, and the vast concourse became quiet. He sounded a blast, the canvas flaps of two openings were pulled aside,

and two lads bare as to chest and with legs clad in trunks bounded into the arena.

A murmur of surprise came from the audience; the antagonists faced each other, and then glared a bitter defiance. From one entrance had come Nattie Manning, and from the other—Ralph Black!

CHAPTER XV.

THE WRESTLING MATCH.

Nattie's several encounters with the younger member of the English firm had been duly discussed in the club, and the discomfiture of the elder merchant during his call upon Grant had been a toothsome morsel for the gossipers of the city.

The enmity between the houses of Manning and Black was the common talk among the foreigners of Yokohama. They were aware of the cause of the trouble, and knew the suspicions concerning the payment of the now-famous debt.

And when the opening of the flaps in the dressing-tent had disclosed the youths destined to face each other for the supremacy of the wrestling ring, a murmuring sound rolled through the concourse like the echoes of a passing wind.

"It's young Black and Nattie Manning!" cried more than one. "Whew! there will be a warm tussle now."

Over in one corner of the grand stand Grant and Mori sat in amazement. The *dénouement* was entirely unexpected to them. Not long did they remain silent. Up

sprang the lame youth, his kindly face glowing with excitement. Mounting a vacant chair despite his infirmity, he shook a bundle of English notes in the air, and shouted:

“Ten to one on my brother! Ten to one! ten to one! Twenty pounds even that he secures the first two points! Whoop! where are the backers of the other side? I’ll make it fifteen to one in five-pound notes. Who will take the bet?”

In the meantime Mori had not been idle. Forcing his way directly to where Mr. Black was sitting with the Germans, he shook a bag of coin in the air, and dared them to place a wager with him. Following his example came half a dozen American friends of the new firm, and presently the grand stand resounded with the cries of eager bettors.

Down in the arena Nattie and Ralph stood confronting one another like tigers in a forest jungle. The former’s face was set with determination. He had long wished for just such an opportunity. It had come at last.

Ralph’s face wore a peculiar pallor. It was not fear, but rather that of one who felt the courage of desperation. He well knew there was little difference in physical strength between them, but he appeared to lack the stamina of honesty and merit.

Both lads were in the pink of condition, and they formed a picture appealing to the hearts of all lovers of athletics. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on either. If anything, Ralph was slightly taller, but Nattie's arms gave promise of greater length and muscle.

Presently the din in the grand stand ceased. Wagers had been given and taken on both sides with great freedom. Grant had collapsed into a chair with his purse empty and his notebook covered with bets. Mori was still seeking takers with great persistency.

A blast was sounded on the herald's trumpet, and the eyes of the vast audience were centered on the ring. The judges took their places, the umpire hopped to the middle, and with a wave of his fan gave the signal.

Nattie and Ralph faced each other, eye to eye. Slowly sinking down until their hands rested upon their knees, they waited for an opportunity to grapple.

The silence was intense. The far-away echoes of a steamer's whistle came from the distant bay. A chant of voices sounding like the murmur of humming-birds was wafted in from a neighboring temple. The hoarse croaking of a black crow—the city's scavenger—came from a circling figure overhead.

A minute passed.

Nattie straightened. Ralph followed his example.

Warily they approached each other. Face to face, and eye to eye; intent upon every step, they began to march sideways; always watching, always seeking for an opening. Their hands twitched in readiness for a dash, a grip, a tug.

Each had his weight thrown slightly forward, and his shoulders slouched a little, watching for an unwary move. Nattie feinted suddenly. His right arm darted out, he touched Ralph's shoulder, but the English youth dodged, only to be grasped by the waist by his antagonist's left hand.

There was a sharp tug, a whirl of the figures, then they broke away, each still upon his feet. A vast sigh came from the audience, and Grant chuckled almost deliriously.

The antagonists rested, still confronting each other. Ralph's pallor had given way to an angry flush. His lips moved as if muttering oaths. Nattie remained cool and imperturbable. His was the advantage. Coolness in combat is half the battle. Those in the audience that had risked their money upon the merchant's son began to regret their actions.

The match was not won, however.

At the end of five minutes a signal came from the umpire. Before the flash of his brilliantly decorated fan had

vanished from the eyes of the audience, Nattie darted forward and clashed breast to breast against Ralph.

The latter put forth his arms blindly, gropingly; secured a partial hold of his opponent's neck, essayed a backward lunge, but in the hasty effort stumbled and suddenly found himself upon his back with the scattering gusts of sand settling around him.

And then how the grand stand rang with cheers!

"First bout for Manning!"

"A fair fall, and a great one!"

High above the tumult of sounds echoed a shrill voice:

"Thirty to one on my brother! I offer it in sovereigns! Take it up if you dare!"

The victor stood modestly bowing from side to side, but there was a glitter of pride in his eyes which told of the pleasure he felt—doubly a pleasure, because his antagonist was Ralph Black.

The latter had been assisted to his feet by the men appointed for the purpose. He was trembling in every limb, but it was from rage, not exhaustion. His breath came in short, quick gasps, and he glared at Nattie as if meditating an assault.

Again the umpire's fan gave the signal, and once more the combatants faced each other for the second point. And now happened a grievous thing for our heroes.

Nattie was not ordinarily self-assured. There was no room in his character for conceit; but his triumph in the present case caused him to make a very serious mistake.

He failed at this critical moment to bear in mind Moltke's famous advice: "He who would win in war must put himself in his enemy's place." Flushed with his victory he entered into the second bout with a carelessness that brought him to disaster in the twinkling of an eye.

Ralph Black, smarting under defeat, kept his wits about him, however, and, adopting his opponent's tactics, made a fierce rush at the instant of the signal. Grasping Nattie by the waist, he forced him aside, and then backward with irresistible force.

The result—the lad found himself occupying almost the same spot of earth which bore Ralph's former imprint. Now was the time for the opposition to cheer, and that they did right royally. Counter shouts came from the American faction, and again Grant and Mori's voices arose above the tumult inviting wagers.

Five minutes of rest, then came the time for the final and decisive bout.

It was with very different feelings that Nattie passed to the center of the ring now. His handsome face plainly bespoke humiliation, but there was a flash of the eyes

which also announced a grim and desperate determination. It was like that of Ben Hur when he swept around the arena with his chargers on the last circle.

Ralph was plainly elated. He paused long enough to wave one hand toward a group of friends; then the twain faced for the last time. It was evident from the outset that the bout would not last very long.

Warily, and with the utmost caution, the lads confronted each other. Side by side they edged and retreated. A silence as of the tombs of forgotten races fell upon the audience.

Suddenly—no man's eyes were quick enough to see the start—Nattie dropped almost on all fours at Ralph's feet. He lunged forward, grasped the English youth's hips, then with a mighty effort which brought the blood in a scarlet wave to his face, he surged upward, and, with a crash, the merchant's son lay a motionless heap in the center of the arena!

And the match was won!

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE VICTORY.

The match was won, and Nattie had come out victorious. There was an instant of silence after the clever throw—silence like that which precedes a storm—then the grounds rang with a tumult of applause.

With shouts and yells, with clapping of hands and piercing whistles the vast audience proclaimed their appreciation. Men nearer the ring climbed over the low railing and lifting the blushing lad to their shoulders, formed the nucleus of a triumphal procession.

Around the arena they marched until at last Nattie struggled free by main force. Retreating to the dressing-tent, he disappeared within its shelter, followed by Grant and Mori. The latter were so filled with joy that they could not find qualifying words in either language, so they shouted alternately in Japanese and English.

In the meantime the defeated wrestler had been brought to a realization of his discomfiture by his father and several surgeons. The fall had stunned him, but no bones were broken. Leaning on his parent, he retired to a *jirikisha* and left the field without changing his costume.

In the dressing-tent Nattie and his companions were holding gay carnival over the victory. The little apartment was crowded with Americans, both civilian and naval, and it soon became evident that the triumph was being regarded as an international affair. It was a victory of the American element over the English.

The difference between Nattie and Ralph had given way to something of greater importance. Through some unexplained reason a strong undercurrent of jealousy exists between members of the two countries in foreign climes, and evidences crop to the surface at intervals.

It generally manifests itself in just such occasions as the present, and from the moment Nattie and Ralph were matched together in the arena, the American and English took sides with their respective countrymen.

The overwhelming importance of the first match detracted all interest from those following, and the celebration was soon brought to a close. Nattie and his companions finally escaped from the field. At Grant's invitation a number of the Americans accompanied him to a well-known tea house in the city where dinner was served in honor of the occasion.

Of course the victor was the lion of the feast, but he bore his honors modestly. On being called upon for a speech he displayed greater trepidation than when he con-

fronted his antagonist in the arena. At last yielding to the vociferous invitation, he arose from his chair and said, bluntly:

"I am no hand to talk, my friends. In our firm my Brother Grant is my mouthpiece. But I can say that I appreciate this honor, and that I am almighty glad I defeated Ralph Black. I guess you know the reason why. I thank you for your kindness."

Then he abruptly resumed his seat, amid the cheers of the party who voted him a good fellow with the enthusiasm of such occasions. The impromptu banquet came to an end in due time, and the coming of the morrow found the boys again at work in the counting-room of Manning Brothers & Okuma.

It was with a chuckle of great satisfaction that Grant counted up the results of his wagers made in the grand stand. He checked off each item with glee, and finally announced to his companions that he was three hundred pounds ahead.

"I don't care a broken penny for the money," he said. "In fact, I intend to turn it over to the hospital fund, but it's the fact of beating those Englishmen that tickles me. Nattie, if you had permitted Ralph Black to throw you in that last bout I would have disowned you and retired to a Shinton monastery."

"My, what a fate I saved you from!" grinned his brother. "Fancy you a monk with that hoppity-skip foot of yours. But how is Ralph? Have either of you heard?"

"Some one told me this morning that he was feeling very sore—in spirits," laughed Mori. "They say he took the early train for Kobe, where he intends to stay until his humiliation has a chance to disappear."

"I'll wager a *yen* yesterday's work has not increased his liking for us," carelessly remarked the lame youth. "What did you get out of his father and those Germans, Mori? I saw you hovering about them with a bag of coin. Did the old man do any betting?"

"Five hundred dollars. I gave him odds of seven to one. I also have the German merchants, Swartz and Bauer, listed for a cool thousand. Whew! won't they groan in bitterness of spirit when I send over for the money?"

"I only regret one thing in the whole affair," said Nattie. "And that is my confounded carelessness in permitting Ralph to throw me in the second bout. It was a case of 'swell-head,' I suppose. The first throw was so easy I thought all the rest would be like it. However, all's well that ends well. The match is won, and the English will sing low for a time."

During the balance of the week the members of the new firm labored early and late arranging their shipments of tea and silks. Each steamer carried a consignment of goods to America, and in return came cargoes of merchandise, flour, printed goods, machinery and wool.

The events of the past few days had advertised the firm to such an extent that the volume of business became burdensome. In due course of time the flood of money turned and began to flow back into the coffers. Bills outstanding at short periods matured, and the bank account assumed healthy proportions.

Mori was compelled to withdraw his last loan of thirty thousand dollars, given at a most critical point in the firm's brief existence despite his protest. At the end of the third week two extra warehouses were leased, and the clerical force in the office doubled.

All this was very comforting to Grant and his associates, but there still remained a more valuable prize. The rumors of war between China and Japan, which had bubbled to the surface of the political caldron many times during the past year, now began to attract public attention.

The government disclaimed any idea of impending war, but it quietly proceeded with its preparations at the same time. It was known among the merchants that a large

order for arms and ammunition would be given out on the first day of August, and the competition became very keen.

Through his personal friendship with the secretary of war, and the integrity of the new firm, Grant was acknowledged as possessing the best chance. There was one company, however, that had not given up hope of securing the prize, and that was the firm of Black & Son.

The reader will doubtless remember the meeting held in the English merchant's office between father and son and the ex-bookkeeper, Willis Round. At that consultation the latter had disclosed a plan for the defeat of Grant Manning.

The affair of the "go-down," when Round was foiled in his attempt to start a conflagration, delayed the schemes of the conspirators, but the near approach of the time for awarding the valuable contract, again found them at work.

Mr. Black was the only one of the three present in Yokohama. Willis Round was an exile for obvious reasons, and Ralph chose to absent himself after the wrestling match on the seventh of July. By arrangement the twain met in an interior village north of the capital, where they schemed and plotted for the downfall of their enemies.

At the expiration of two weeks Patrick Cronin was

released from jail and advised by the authorities to leave the country. Thus everything promised peace for our heroes, and the prosperity of honest labor fell to their lot day by day.

All three were too shrewd to allow such a pleasant state of affairs to lull their watchfulness. They knew that in war silence is ominous, and that many a maneuver is projected under the veil of a temporary truce. As it came to pass, however, something occurred that deceived even Nattie's suspicious eye.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TURNING UP OF A BAD PENNY AND ITS RESULTS.

Nattie's duties as warehouseman and shipper of the firm took him aboard the shipping of the port day by day. When a consignment of tea or silk was conveyed from the "go-down" in lighters to the steamers riding at anchor in the bay, the lad would visit the vessels to see that the goods were checked properly.

Also when the smaller coasting craft would arrive from other ports with cargoes from the local agents of the firm, Nattie's duty carried him on board to sign the receipts.

One morning while on the latter journey to a coaster from Kobe he was surprised to see an old acquaintance among the crew. It was the recreant watchman, Patrick Cronin.

Still harboring resentment for the fellow's actions on that memorable night when Willis Round made his dastardly attempt to fire the "go-down" with its valuable contents, Nattie passed him without recognition. After attending to his business on board, he started to leave the little steamer.

As he was preparing to descend to his cutter, he felt a touch upon his shoulder. Turning, he saw Patrick with an expression of great humility upon his rugged face.

"What is it?" asked Nattie, sharply.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but could Oi have a bit of a talk wid yer?" replied the Irishman, pleadingly.

"Well, what do you wish to say? Make haste; I am in a hurry."

"Could yer step back here a bit where we won't be overheard, sir? It's something of interest to yourself Oi have to say, sir. Maybe ye'll think it's valuable information Oi have before Oi'm through."

Laughing incredulously, Nattie walked over to the break of the forecastle, and bade his companion proceed with his yarn. He thought it would prove to be a sly attempt to secure another position with the firm, and he firmly intended to refuse the request.

"Now what is it?" he again demanded, impatiently.

"It's mad ye are at me, Oi suppose?"

"See here, Patrick Cronin, if you have anything to tell me, speak out. My time is too valuable to waste just now. If you intend to ask for a situation with the firm you had better save your breath. One experience with you is enough."

Instead of becoming angry at this plain talk, Patrick set to chuckling with good humor.

"Oi don't blame yer for being down on me," he said, with what seemed very like a wink. "Oi should not have let that spalpane tempt me wid th' drink. Oi have it in for him, and by th' same token that's why Oi'm now talking to yer."

"Do you know where Willis Round is?" quickly asked Nattie.

"Maybe Oi do, and maybe Oi don't. It's for you to say, sir."

"For me to say? What have I to do with it?"

"Would yer like to capture him?" asked Patrick, cunningly.

Nattie thought a moment before replying. Would it really be worth the candle to bring the ex-bookkeeper to justice? The chase might entail a journey and some expense. But then would it not be advisable for the sake of future peace to have Round behind prison bars?

"As long as he is at liberty," thought the lad, "we can expect trouble. This chance of disarming him should not be neglected."

"Yes; I would very much like to capture the fellow," he added, aloud. "I suppose you know where he is, or you would not mention the subject."

"I do know his whereabouts this blessed minute."

"Well?"

The Irishman leered significantly.

"Ah, you wish to sell the information, I suppose?" said Nattie, a light breaking in upon him.

"It's wise ye are."

"Can you tell me exactly where he is, so that I can send and have him arrested?"

"No, no. Ye mustn't send the police, sir. If ye want to capture the spalpane ye must go yerself, or wid a friend. The boobies of officers would spoil everything. If Oi give the man away Oi must be sure he will be put in prison, as he'd kill me for informing on him."

"Oh, I see," said Nattie, contemptuously. "You wish to save your precious skin. Well, if it is worth while I'll go for him myself, or probably take Mori. Now where is he?"

"Is the information worth twenty pounds, sir?"

"No; decidedly not."

Patrick looked discomfited.

"But think of th' good Oi'm doing yer," he pleaded. "Mister Round is a bad man, and he'll keep yer in a torment of suspense until ye put him away. Won't ye make it twenty pounds, sir?"

"No."

"Then how much?"

"Half that is a big amount for the information."

"Call it twelve pounds, and it's a bargain."

"All right; but understand, you are not to get a cent until the man is captured."

"Oh, Oi'll agree to that. Oi'll go wid yer if ye pay the fare."

"Very well. Now where is Willis Round?"

"He's stopping in Nagasaki."

"Nagasaki? What part?"

"That Oi'll show yer in due time. He's hid away in a place ye wouldn't dream of lookin' into. When do you want to start, sir?"

"As soon as possible. We can leave on the evening train and reach there by daylight. Get your discharge from the steamer and report to me at the station about six o'clock."

"And who will ye take besides me, sir? It'll be just as well to have a mate, as there's no telling what'll happen."

Nattie eyed the speaker keenly.

"So you think there will be no trouble in effecting the capture, eh?" he said.

"No; but it's a good thing to be prepared in this worruld."

"There is more truth than poetry in that," was the

grim reply. "I think Mr. Okuma will accompany me. He intended to run down in that direction before long, anyway. Now don't fail, Patrick. Be at the station at six."

The ex-watchman waved his hand in assent as the lad entered his boat, then he retreated to the forecastle with an expression of great satisfaction upon his face. During the balance of the morning he proceeded about his work with evident good humor.

Shortly before noon he borrowed a piece of paper and an envelope from the purser, and laboriously indited a letter with the stump of a lead pencil. Sealing the epistle, he wrote upon the back:

"MISTER JESSE BLACK, ESQ.,
"The Bund, forninst Main Street,
"Yokohammer, Japan."

After regarding his work with complacency, he asked the captain for his discharge. On being paid off, he went ashore and disappeared in the direction of the general post office.

In the meantime Nattie had returned to the office, supremely unconscious of Patrick's duplicity. He found Grant and Mori making up the invoices for a cargo of lacquered ware. He explained his news at once.

"It's a good chance to strike Black & Son a blow they

will be not likely to forget in a hurry," he added, throwing himself into a chair. "Perhaps we can get a confession from the fellow, also."

"You mean about that debt?" asked Mori.

"Yes. When he is compelled to face a five years' sentence for attempted arson perhaps he'll 'split' on his confederates. In that case if it turns out as we suspect, the English firm will be wiped out."

Grant shook his head doubtfully.

"I do not like the source of your information, Nattie," he said. "In my opinion, Patrick Cronin is not to be trusted."

"Oh, he's all right. He has it in for Round for playing him such a trick, and he is trying to get even. Then the twelve pounds is something to him."

"We might run down to Nagasaki," thoughtfully remarked the Japanese youth. "I intended to drum up trade in that direction, anyway. It will be a nice little trip, even if nothing comes of it."

"Something tells me that it will be a wild-goose chase," replied Grant. "You can try it, though. I can spare both of you for three or four days about now. You need a vacation, anyway."

"What about yourself, brother?" asked Nattie, gener-

ously. "You have worked harder than either of us. Why can't you come also?"

"What, and leave the business go to the dogs! Oh, no, my dear boy. What would I do with a vacation? I am never happier than when I am pouring over accounts in this office, believe me. Get away with you now. Run home and pack up for your trip. But let me give you a bit of advice."

"What is it?"

"Take revolvers, and see that the cartridges are in good condition. Also, don't go poking about the suburbs of Nagasaki without a squad of police."

"One would think we are bound after a band of outlaws in the Indian Territory at home," laughed Nattie. "Willis Round is not such a formidable man as all that."

"No; but you don't know who else you may have to contend with. Another thing: keep your eye on Patrick Cronin. Good-by."

On reaching the station that evening Mori and Nattie found the Irishman awaiting their arrival. He was all smiles and good humor, and his rugged face was as guileless as that of a new-born babe. Verily the human countenance is not always an index to one's true nature.

"It's plazed Oi am to see yer, gentlemen," he said,

suavely. "I did think ye might be after changing yer minds. It's near train time now."

"We are here," replied Nattie, briefly. "Get into the car."

He purchased three tickets for Nagasaki by way of Kobe and followed them into the train. A moment later the long line of coaches left the station and rolled rapidly on into the night.

After a brief stop at Kobe, which was reached shortly before daybreak, the train resumed its course along the edge of the sea. A short distance from the city the tracks were laid directly upon the coast, only a parapet of stone separating the rails from the water's edge.

Feeling restless and unable to sleep, Nattie left his bed, and throwing on his outer clothing, stepped out upon the platform. He was presently joined by Mori, and the twain stood watching the flitting panorama.

A storm, which had been gathering in the south, presently broke, lashing the broad surface of the sea into an expanse of towering waves. As the gale increased in force, the caps of water began to break over the parapet in salty spray.

"Whew! I guess we had better beat a retreat," exclaimed Mori, after receiving an extra dash of moisture.

"Wait a moment," pleaded Nattie. "I hate to leave

such a grand scene. What a picture the angry seas make! My! that was a tremendous wave! It actually shook the train."

"Murder and saints!" groaned a voice at his elbow. "Phwat is the matter, sir? Is it going to sea we are in a train of cars? 'Tis the first time Patrick Cronin ever traveled on a craft without masts or hull. Oi think it do be dangerous along here, saving yer presence."

Before either Nattie or Mori could reply to the evidently truthful remark, a line of water, curling upward in threatening crests, dashed over the parapet and fairly deluged the platforms. It was with the greatest difficulty the three could retain their hold.

Now thoroughly alarmed, they endeavored to enter the car. Suddenly the speed of the train became lessened, then it stopped altogether. A moment later the grinding of heavy driving wheels was heard, and the line of coaches began to back up the track. It was a precaution taken too late.

Before the cars had obtained much headway a wall of glistening water was hurled over the parapet with resistless force, sweeping everything before it. Amid the shouts and screams of a hundred victims the coaches and engine were tumbled haphazard from the track, piling up in a mass of wreckage against the cliff.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EVIL TIDINGS.

To those who have not experienced the coming of sudden disaster, word descriptions are feeble. It is easy to tell how this and that occurred; to speak of the wails and cries of the injured; to try to depict the scene in sturdy English, but the soul-thrilling terror, the horror, and physical pain of the moment must be felt.

In the present case the accident was so entirely unexpected that the very occurrence carried an added quota of dreadful dismay. The spot had never been considered unsafe. At the time of construction eminent engineers had decided that it would be perfectly feasible to lay the rails close to the edge of the sea.

A stout parapet of stone afforded ample protection, in their opinion, but they had not gauged the resistless power of old ocean. The coming of a fierce south wind worked the mischief, and in much less time than is required in the telling, the doomed train was cast a mass of wreckage against the unyielding face of the cliff.

The first crash extinguished the lights, adding impenetrable darkness to the scene. It found Nattie and Mori

within touch of each other. They instinctively groped together; but a second and more violent wrench of the coach sent them flying in different directions.

The instinct of life is strong in all. The drowning wretch's grasp at a straw is only typical of what mortals will do to keep aglow the vital spark.

Terror-stricken, and stunned from the force of the shock, Nattie still fought desperately for existence. He felt the coach reeling beneath his feet, he was tossed helplessly like a truss of hay from side to side, and then almost at his elbow he heard a familiar voice shrieking:

"Mercy! mercy! The blessed saints have mercy upon a poor sinner. Oi'm sorry for me misdeeds. Oi regret that Oi was even now going against the law. Oi confess that Oi meant to lead them two young fellows away so that——"

The words ended in a dreadful groan as the car gave a violent lurch, then Nattie felt a shock of pain and he lost consciousness. When he came to, it was to find the bright sun shining in his face.

It was several moments before he could recognize his surroundings. A sound as of persons moaning in agony brought back the dreadful truth. He found himself lying upon a stretcher, and near at hand were others, each bearing a similar burden.

The temporary beds were stretched along the face of the cliff. A dozen feet away was a huge mass of shattered coaches and the wreck of a locomotive. A number of Japanese were still working amid the *débris*, evidently in search of more victims of the disaster.

Nattie attempted to rise, but the movement caused him excruciating pain in the left shoulder. A native, evidently a surgeon, was passing at the moment, and noticing the action, he said, with a smile of encouragement:

"Just keep quiet, my lad. You are all right, merely a dislocation. Do not worry, we will see that you are well taken care of."

"But my friend?" replied the boy, faintly. "His name is Mori Okuma, and he was near me when the accident occurred. Can you tell me anything of him? Is he safe?"

"Is he one of my countrymen, a youth like yourself, and clad in tweed?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I can relieve your anxiety," was the cheering reply. "He is working like a trooper over there among the coaches. It was he who rescued you and brought you here. Wait; I will call him."

A moment later Mori made his appearance, but how

sadly changed was his usually neat appearance. His hat was gone, his clothing torn and disordered, and his face grimed with dust and dirt. He laughed cheerily, however, on seeing Nattie, and made haste to congratulate him on his escape.

"This is brave," he exclaimed. "You will soon be all right, old boy. No, don't try to get up; your arm is dislocated at the shoulder, and perfect quiet is absolutely necessary."

"But I can't lie here like a stick, Mori," groaned the lad. "What's a dislocation, anyway? It shouldn't keep a fellow upon his back."

"You had better take the doctor's advice. The relief train will start for Kobe before long, and once in a good hotel, you can move about. This is a terrible accident. Fully twenty persons have lost their lives, and as many more wounded."

"Have you seen anything of Patrick Cronin?"

"No, nothing. It is thought several bodies were carried out to sea when the water rolled back after tearing away the parapet. His may be one of them."

The Irishman's words, heard during the height of the turmoil, returned to Nattie. He now saw the significance of the Irishman's cry.

"Something is up, Mori," he said, gravely, explaining

the matter. "It certainly seems as if Patrick was leading us on a wild-goose chase."

"That was Grant's impression, anyway. Did the fellow really use those words?"

"Yes, and he evidently told the truth. He was in fear of death, and he confessed aloud that he was leading us away so that something could happen. At the interesting moment his voice died away to a groan, then I lost consciousness."

"What do you think he could have meant?"

"It is something to do with the Blacks, I'll wager."

"But does he know them?"

"He is acquainted with Willis Round, and that is the same thing."

Mori seemed doubtful.

"You don't think he intended to lead us into a trap?" he asked, incredulously.

"Hardly, but——"

"Grant?"

Nattie sat up in the stretcher despite the pain the effort caused him.

"Mori, we must communicate with him at once," he said. "There is no telling what could happen while we are away. Confound it! I'll never forgive myself if this should prove to be a ruse. Can you telegraph from here?"

"No, we must wait until we reach Kobe. Now don't excite yourself, my dear fellow. You will only work into a fever, and that will retard your recovery. I really think we are mistaken. But even if it should prove true, it won't mend matters by making yourself worse."

The lad fell back with a groan. He acknowledged the wisdom of Mori's remark, and he remained quiet until the relief train finally carried him with the balance of the survivors to the city they had recently left. Mori hastened to the telegraph office after seeing his charge to a hotel.

What Nattie suffered in spirit during the Japanese youth's absence can only be measured by the great love he bore his crippled brother. The very thought that something had happened to him was anguish. He knew that Grant was bravery itself despite his physical disability, and that he would not hesitate to confront his enemies single-handed.

When the turning of the door knob proclaimed Mori's return, Nattie actually bounded from the bed and met him halfway. One glance at the Japanese youth's face was enough. Evil news was written there with a vivid brush. In one hand he held a telegram, which he gave to his companion without a word.

CHAPTER XIX.

BAD NEWS CONFIRMED.

Nattie took the telegram with a sinking heart. He had already read disquieting news in Mori's face, and for a moment he fumbled at the paper as if almost afraid to open it. Finally mustering up courage, he scanned the following words:

"Message received. Grant cannot be found. He left office at usual time last night, but did not appear at his home. Have done nothing in the matter yet. Wire instructions. Sorry to hear of accident."

It was signed by the chief bookkeeper, a Scotchman, named Burr. He was a typical representative of his race, canny, hard-headed, and thoroughly reliable. Sentiment had no place in his nature, but he was as impregnable in honesty as the crags of his own country.

Poor Nattie read the telegram a second, then a third time. The words seemed burned into his brain. There could be only one meaning: Grant Manning had met with disaster. But where, and how? And through whom? The last question was easily answered.

"Mori," he said, with a trembling voice, "this is the work of the Blacks and that scoundrel, Willis Round."

"Something may have happened, but we are not yet certain," gravely replied the Japanese youth. "Surely Grant could take a day off without our thinking the worse."

"You do not know my brother," answered the lad, steadfastly. "He hasn't a bad habit in the world, and the sun is not more regular than he. No, something has happened, and we must leave for Yokohama by the first train."

"It is simply impossible for you to go," expostulated Mori. "The doctor said you must not stir from bed for three days at the very least. I will run down at once, but you must remain here."

"If the affair was reversed, Grant would break the bounds of his tomb to come to me," Nattie replied, simply. "Send for a surgeon and ask him to fix this shoulder for traveling. I want to leave within an hour."

The young Japanese threw up both hands in despair, but he left without further words. In due time the man of medicine appeared and bandaged the dislocated member. A few moments later Nattie and Mori boarded the train for the north.

As the string of coaches whirled through valley and

dell, past paddy fields with their queer network of ridges and irrigating ditches; past groups of open-eyed natives dressed in the quaint blue costumes of the lower classes; through small clusters of thatched bamboo houses, each with its quota of cheerful, laughing babies, tumbling about in the patches of gardens much as the babies of other climes do, Nattie fell to thinking of the great misfortune which had overtaken the firm.

"If something has happened to Grant—which may God forbid—it will be greatly to the interest of Jesse Black," he said, turning to his companion. "Everything points in their direction. The first question in such a case is, who will it benefit?"

"You refer to the army contracts?"

"Yes. It means to the person securing them a profit of over one hundred thousand dollars, and that is a prize valuable enough to tempt a more scrupulous man than the English merchant."

"I think you are right. If Grant has been waylaid, or spirited away, which is yet to be proven, we have something to work on. We will know where to start the search."

Yokohama was reached by nightfall. Mori had telegraphed ahead, and they found Mr. Burr, a tall, grave man with a sandy beard, awaiting them. He expressed

much sympathy for Nattie's condition, and then led the way to the *jinrikishas*.

"I can explain matters better in the office," he said, in answer to an eager question. "'Tis an uncou' night eeny-way, and we'll do better under shelter."

Compelled to restrain their impatience perforce, his companions sank back in silence and watched the nimble feet of the *karumayas* as they trotted along the streets on the way to the Bund.

Turning suddenly into the broad, well-lighted main street, they overtook a man pacing moodily toward the bay. As they dashed past, Nattie glanced at him; then, with an imprecation, the lad stood up in his vehicle. A twinge of pain in the disabled shoulder sent him back again.

Noting the action, Mori looked behind him, and just in time to see the man slip into a convenient doorway. It was Mr. Black.

"Keep cool, Nattie," he called out. "Confronting him without proof won't help us."

"But did you see how he acted when he caught sight of us?"

"Yes, and it meant guilt. He tried to dodge out of our sight."

On reaching the office, Mr. Burr led the way inside.

Lighting the gas, he placed chairs for his companions, and seated himself at his desk.

"Noo I will explain everything," he said, gravely. "But first tell me if ye anticipate anything serious? Has Mr. Grant absented himself before?"

"Never," Nattie replied to the last question.

"Weel, then, the situation is thus: Last night he left here at the usual hour and took a '*rikisha*' in front of the door. I was looking through the window at the time, and I saw him disappear around the corner of Main Street. I opened the office this morning at eight by the clock, and prepared several papers and checks for his signature. Time passed and he did na' show oop.

"At eleven I sent a messenger to the house on the 'bluff.' The boy returned with the information from the servants that Mr. Grant had not been home. Somewhat alarmed, I sent coolies through the town to all the places where he might have called, but without results. I received your telegram and answered it at once. And that's all I know."

The information was meager enough. Nattie and Mori exchanged glances of apprehension. Their worst fears were realized. That some disaster had happened to Grant was now evident. The former sprang to his feet and started toward the door without a word.

"Where are you going?" asked the Japanese youth, hastily.

"To see Mr. Black," was the determined reply. "The villain is responsible for this."

"But what proof can you present? Don't do anything rash, Nattie. We must talk it over and consider the best plan to be followed. We must search for a clew."

"And in the meantime they will kill him. Oh, Mori, I can't sit here and parley words while my brother is in danger. I know Ralph Black and his father. They would not hesitate at anything to make money. Even human life would not stop them."

"That may be. Still, you surely can see that we must go slow in the matter. Believe me, Grant's disappearance affects me even more than if he was a near relative. I intend to enter heart and soul into the search for him. Everything I possess, my fortune, all, is at his disposal. But I must counsel patience."

The tears welled in Nattie's eyes. He tried to mutter his thanks, but his emotion was too great. He extended his hand, and it was grasped by the young native with fraternal will. The Scot had been eying them with his habitual placidity. The opening of a crater under the office floor would not have altered his calm demeanor.

"Weel, now," he said, slowly, "can you no explain matters to me? I am groping about in the dark."

"You shall be told everything," replied Mori.

He speedily placed him in possession of all the facts. Mr. Burr listened to the story without comment. At the conclusion he said, in his quiet way:

"I am no great hand at detective work, but I can see as far thro' a millstone as any mon with twa gude eyes. Mister Grant has been kidnaped, and ye don't need to look farther than the Black's for a clew."

"That is my opinion exactly," exclaimed Nattie.

"I am with you both," said Mori, "but I still insist that we go slow in accusing them. It stands to reason that to make a demand now would warn the conspirators—for such they are—that we suspect them. We must work on the quiet."

"You are right, sir," agreed Mr. Burr.

"What is your plan?" asked Nattie, with natural impatience.

"It is to place Mr. Burr in charge of the business at once, and for us to start forth in search of possible clews. I will try to put a man in the Black residence, and another in his office. We must hire a number of private detectives—I know a dozen—and set them to work scouring the city. The station master, the keeper of every road, the

railway guards, all must be closely questioned. And in the meantime, while I am posting Mr. Burr, you must go home and keep as quiet as you can. Remember, excitement will produce inflammation in that shoulder, and inflammation means many days in bed."

The authoritative tone of the young Japanese had its effect. Grumbling at his enforced idleness, Nattie left the office and proceeded to the "bluff." Mori remained at the counting-room, and carefully drilled the Scotchman in the business on hand.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN BEYOND THE HEDGE.

It was past midnight when he finally left with Mr. Burr, but the intervening time had not been wasted. Orders, contracts and other details for at least a week had been explained to the bookkeeper, and he was given full powers to act as the firm's representative. After a final word of caution, Mori parted with him at the door, and took a '*rikisha*' for the Manning residence. He found Nattie pacing the floor of the front veranda. The lad greeted him impatiently.

"Have you heard anything?" he asked.

"Not a word. I have been busy at the office since you left. Everything is arranged. Mr. Burr has taken charge, and he will conduct the business until this thing is settled. We are lucky to have such a man in our employ."

"Yes, yes; Burr is an honest fellow. But what do you intend to do now?"

"Still excited, I see," smiled Mori. He shook a warning finger at the lad, and added, seriously: "Remember what I told you. If you continue in this fashion I will call a doctor and have you taken to the hospital."

"I can't help it," replied Nattie, piteously. "I just can't keep still while Grant is in danger. You don't know how anxious I am. Let me do something to keep my mind occupied."

"If you promise to go to bed for the rest of the night I will give you ten minutes now to discuss our plans. Do you agree?"

"Yes ; but you intend to remain here until morning?"

"No, I cannot spare the time. I must have the detectives searching for clews before daylight."

"Mori, you are a friend indeed. Some day I will show you how much I appreciate your kindness."

"Nonsense! You would do as much if not more if the case was reversed. Now for the plans. To commence, we are absolutely certain of one thing: Patrick Cronin was in the scheme, and he was sent to get us out of the way while Ralph and Willis Round attended to Grant."

"I am glad the Irishman met with his just deserts," exclaimed Nattie, vindictively. "He is now food for fishes."

"Yes ; a fitting fate. The accident cannot be considered an unmixed catastrophe. If it had not occurred we would have gone on to Nagasaki, and have lost much valuable time. As it is, we are comparatively early. What we need now is a clew, and for that I intend to begin a search at once."

"Would it do any good to notify the American Consul?"

"No; our best plan is to keep the affair as quiet as possible. We will say nothing about it. If Grant is missed we can intimate that he has gone away for a week.

"Now go to bed and sleep if you can," he added, preparing to leave. "I will call shortly after breakfast and report progress."

With a friendly nod of his head he departed on his quest for detectives. Nattie remained seated for a brief period, then he walked over to a bell-pull, and summoned a servant. At his command the man brought him a heavy cloak, and assisted him to don his shoes.

From a chest of drawers in an adjacent room the lad took a revolver. After carefully examining the charges he thrust it into his pocket and left the house.

The night was hot and sultry. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the mellow rays of a full moon beamed down on ground and foliage, which seemed to glow with the tropical heat. Notwithstanding the discomfort Nattie drew his cloak about him and set out at a rapid walk down the street leading past the Manning residence.

From out on the bay came the distant rattle of a steamer's winch. The stillness was so oppressive that even the shrill notes of a boatswain's whistle came to his ears. An owl hooted in a nearby maple; the melan-

choly howl of a strolling dog sounded from below where the native town was stretched out in irregular rows of bamboo houses.

The lad kept to the shady side of the road, and continued without stopping until he reached a mansion built in the English style, some ten or eleven blocks from his house. The building stood in the center of extensive grounds, and was separated from the street by an ornamental iron fence and a well-cultivated hedge.

It was evidently the home of a man of wealth. In fact, it was the domicile of Mr. Black and his son Ralph. What was Nattie's object in leaving the Manning residence in face of Mori's warning? What was his object in paying a visit to his enemy at such an hour of the night?

Anxious, almost beside himself with worry, suffering severely from his dislocated shoulder, and perhaps slightly under the influence of a fever, the lad had yielded to his first impulse when alone, and set out from home with no settled purpose.

On reaching the open air he thought of Jesse Black. The mansion was only a short distance away; perhaps something could be learned by watching it. The conjecture was father to the deed.

Selecting a spot shaded by a thick-foliaged tree, Nattie carefully scanned the *façade* of the building. It was of

two stories, and prominent bow-windows jutted out from each floor. The lower part was dark, but a dim light shone through the curtains of the last window on the right.

A bell down in the Bund struck twice; it was two o'clock. At the sound a dark figure appeared at the window and thrust the shade aside. The distance was not too great for Nattie to distinguish the man as the English merchant.

Drawing himself up the lad shook his fist at the apparition. The action brought his head above the hedge. Something moving on the other side caught his eye, and he dodged back just as a man arose to his feet within easy touch.

Breathless with amazement, Nattie crouched down, and parting the roots of the hedge, peered through. The fellow was cautiously moving toward the house. Something in his walk seemed familiar. Presently he reached a spot where the moon's bright rays fell upon him.

A stifled cry of profound astonishment, not unmingled with terror, came from the lad's lips, and he shrank back as if with the intention of fleeing. He thought better of it, however, and watched with eager eyes. A dozen times the man in the grounds halted and crouched to the earth, but finally he reached the front entrance of the mansion.

A door was opened, and a hand was thrust forth with

beckoning fingers. The fellow hastily stepped inside and vanished from view, leaving Nattie a-quiver with excitement. The dislocated shoulder, the pain, the fever, all were forgotten in the importance of the discovery.

"That settles it," he muttered. "I am on the right track as sure as the moon is shining. Now I must enter that house by hook or crook. But who would believe that miracles could happen in this century? If that fellow wasn't——"

He abruptly ceased speaking. The door in the front entrance suddenly opened, and a huge dog was thrust down the stone steps. Nattie knew the animal well. It was a ferocious brute Ralph had imported from England that year.

As a watchdog it bore a well-merited reputation among the natives of thieving propensities. It was dreaded because it thought more of a direct application of sharp teeth than any amount of barking. Its unexpected appearance on the scene altered matters considerably.

"Dog or no dog, I intend to find my way into that house before many minutes," decided the lad. "It is an opportunity I cannot permit to pass."

He drew out his revolver, but shook his head and re-stored it again to his pocket. A shot would alarm the

neighborhood and bring a squad of police upon the scene. The brute must be silenced in some other manner.

Naturally apt and resourceful, it was not long before Nattie thought of a plan. Cautiously edging away from the hedge until he had reached a safe distance, he set out at a run toward home. Fortunately, the street was free from police or pedestrians, and he finally gained the Manning residence without being observed.

Slipping into the garden he whistled softly. A big-jointed, lanky pup slouched up to him and fawned about his feet. Picking up the dog, he started back with it under his right arm. The return to the English merchant's house was made without mishap.

Reaching the hedge, Nattie lightly tossed the pup over into the yard. It struck the ground with a yelp, and a second later a dark shadow streaked across the lawn from the mansion. As the lad had anticipated, the dog he had brought did not wait to be attacked, but started along the inner side of the hedge with fear-given speed. In less than a moment pursuer and pursued disappeared behind an outlying stable.

Chuckling at the success of his scheme, Nattie softly climbed the fence and leaped into the yard. The lawn was bright with the rays of the moon, but he walked across it

without hesitation, finally reaching the house near the left-hand corner.

As he expected, he found a side door unguarded save by a wire screen. A swift slash with a strong pocket-knife gave an aperture through which the lad forced his hand. To unfasten the latch was the work of a second, and a brief space later he stood in a narrow hall leading to the main corridor.

CHAPTER XXI.

A PRISONER.

On reaching the main stairway he heard voices overhead. The sound seemed to come from a room opening into the hall above. Quickly removing his shoes, the lad tied the strings together, and throwing them about his neck, he ascended to the upper floor.

Fortunately, Nattie had visited the Black mansion in his earlier days when he and Ralph were on terms of comparative intimacy. He knew the general plan of the house, and the knowledge stood him in good stead now.

The room from which the sound of voices came was a study used by the English merchant himself. Next to it was a spare apartment filled with odd pieces of furniture and what-not. In former days it was a guest chamber, and the lad had occupied it one night while on a visit to the merchant's son.

He remembered that a door, surmounted by a glass transom, led from the study to the spare room, and that it would be an easy matter to see into the former by that means.

He tried the knob, and found that it turned at his touch.

A slight rattle underneath proclaimed that a bunch of keys was swinging from the lock. Closing the door behind him, he tiptoed across the apartment, carefully avoiding the various articles of furniture.

To his great disappointment, he found that heavy folds of cloth had been stretched across the transom, completely obstructing the view. To make it worse, the voices were so faint that it was impossible for him to distinguish more than an occasional word.

"Confound it! I have my labor for my pains!" he muttered. "It's a risky thing, but I'll have to try the other door."

He had barely reached the hall when the talking in the next room became louder, then he heard a rattling of the knob. The occupants were on the point of leaving the study. To dart into the spare room was Nattie's first action. Dropping behind a large dressing-case, he listened intently.

"Well, I am thoroughly satisfied with your part of the affair so far," came to his eager ears in the English merchant's well-known voice. "It was well planned in every respect. You had a narrow escape though."

A deep chuckle came from the speaker's companion.

"No suspicion attaches to me," continued Mr. Black. "I met the boys last night, but I don't think they saw me."

"Oh, didn't we?" murmured Nattie.

"You can go now. Give this letter of instructions to my son, and tell him to make all haste to the place mentioned. Return here with his answer as quickly as you can. In this purse you will find ample funds to meet all legitimate expenses. Legitimate expenses, you understand? If you fall by the wayside in the manner I mentioned before you will not get a *sen* of the amount I promised you. Now—confound those rascally servants of mine! they have left this room unlocked! I must discharge the whole lot of them and get others."

Click! went the key in the door behind which Nattie crouched. He was a prisoner!

The sound of footsteps came faintly to him; he heard the front entrance open; then it closed again, and all was silent in the house. After waiting a reasonable time he tried the knob, but it resisted his efforts. Placing his right shoulder against the wood he attempted to force the panel, but without avail.

"Whew! this is being caught in a trap certainly! A pretty fix I am in now. And it is just the time to track that scoundrel. Mr. Black must have been talking about poor Grant."

Rendered almost frantic by his position, Nattie threw himself against the door with all his power. The only re-

sult was a deadly pain in the injured shoulder. Almost ready to cry with chagrin and anguish, he sat down upon a chair and gave himself up to bitter reflections.

Minutes passed, a clock in the study struck three; but still he sat there a prey to conflicting emotions. He now saw that he had acted foolishly. What had he learned? They had suspected the Blacks before, and confirmation was not needed.

The discovery of the visitor's identity was something, but its importance was more than counterbalanced by the disaster which had befallen Nattie. The recent conversation in the hall indicated that the merchant's companion would leave at once for a rendezvous to meet Ralph, and possibly Grant.

"And here I am, fastened in like a disobedient child," groaned the lad. "I must escape before daylight. If I am caught in here Mr. Black can have me arrested on a charge of attempted burglary. It would be just nuts to him."

The fear of delay, engendered by this new apprehension, spurred him to renewed activity. He again examined the door, but speedily gave up the attempt. Either a locksmith's tools or a heavy battering-ram would be necessary to force it.

Creeping to the one window opening from the apart-

ment, Nattie found that he could raise it without much trouble. The generous rays of the moon afforded ample light. By its aid he saw that a dense mass of creeping vines almost covered that side of the mansion.

“By George! a chance at last!”

Cautiously crawling through the opening he clutched a thick stem and tried to swing downward with his right hand. As he made the effort a pain shot through his injured shoulder so intense that he almost fainted. He repressed a cry with difficulty.

Weak and trembling, he managed to regain the window sill. Once in the room he sank down upon the floor and battled with the greatest anguish it had ever been his lot to feel.

To add to his suffering, came the conviction that he would be unable to escape. He remembered the telltale slit he had made in the screen door. When daylight arrived it would be discovered by the servants, and a search instituted throughout the house.

“Well, it can’t be helped,” mused the lad. “If I am caught, I’m caught, and that’s all there is about it.”

It is a difficult thing to philosophize when suffering with an intense physical pain and in the throes of a growing fever. It was not long before Nattie fell into a stupor.

He finally became conscious of an increasing light in the

room, and roused himself enough to glance from the window. Far in the distance loomed the mighty volcano of Fuji San, appearing under the marvelous touch of the morning sun like an inverted cone of many jewels.

A hum of voices sounded in the lower part of the house, but no one came to disturb him. Rendered drowsy by fever, he fell into a deep slumber, and when he awoke it was to hear the study clock strike nine. He had slept fully five hours.

Considerably refreshed, Nattie started up to again search for a way to effect his escape. The pain had left his shoulder, but he felt an overpowering thirst. His mind was clear, however, and that was half the battle.

"If I had more strength in my left arm I would try those vines once more," he said to himself. "Things can't last this way forever. I must—what's that?"

Footsteps sounded in the hall outside. They drew nearer, and at last stopped in front of the spare-room door. A hand was laid upon the knob, and keys rattled.

"We have searched every room but this," came in the smooth tones of the English merchant. "Go inside, my man, and see if a burglar is hiding among the furniture. Here, take this revolver; and don't fear to use it if necessary."

Like a hunted animal at bay, the lad glared about him.

Discovery seemed certain. Over in one corner he espied a chest of drawers. It afforded poor concealment, but it was the best at hand. To drag it away from the wall was the work of a second. When the door was finally opened, Nattie was crouched behind the piece of furniture.

He heard the soft steps of a pair of sandals; he heard chairs and various articles moved about, then the searcher approached his corner. Desperate and ready to fight for his liberty, he glanced up—and uttered a half-stifled cry of amazement and joy!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PURSUIT.

It is always the unexpected that happens. When Nattie glanced up from his place of refuge behind the chest of drawers, he saw a young man clad as a native servant looking down at him. There was the gayly colored cloth tied around the head; the *kimono*, or outer garment cut away at the neck, and the plain silk kerchief tied with a bow under the ear.

But the face was not that of a native *waallo*, or houseman; it was Mori Okuma himself, the very last person on earth Nattie expected to find in the spare room of the Black mansion.

The young Japanese started back in profound surprise, his eyes widened, and he nearly called out; but a warning motion from the concealed lad—who recovered his coolness with marvelous rapidity—checked him.

“It is I; Nattie!” came to his ears. “Take old Black away and return as soon as possible. I have a clew; we must leave here immediately.”

Regaining his composure with an effort, Mori continued his search among the other articles of furniture.

"No one here, excellency," he said, at last.

"Then the scoundrel who cut that screen door has decamped," replied Mr. Black, who had remained near the door with commendable precaution. "Go down to the pantry and help the rest count the silver. By the way, what is your name?"

"Kai Jin, excellency."

"Well, Kai, see that you behave yourself and you can remain in my service. But if you are lazy or thievish, out you go."

His voice died away in muffled grumbling down the hall. Finally left to himself, Nattie emerged from his hiding place and executed several figures of a jig in the middle of the floor.

"Wonders will never cease," he muttered, with a chuckle of joy. "Fancy finding Mori here, and just in the nick of time. He's a great lad. He disguised himself and took service in the house. He would make a good detective."

He was still pondering over the queer discovery when a noise at the door indicated that some one was on the point of entering. A warning whisper proclaimed that it was Mori.

The Japanese youth entered quickly and closed the heavy oaken portal behind him. He was shaking with

suppressed laughter. Running over to Nattie, he grasped his hand and wrung it heartily.

"I ought to scold you for disobeying my orders, but really this is too funny for anything," he said. "How under the sun did you get in here?"

"Easy enough; I walked in last night. How did you get in?"

"I am a member of his excellency's staff of servants. Ha, ha! I almost laughed in his lean old face this morning when he engaged me. But explain yourself, Nattie; I am dying to hear your news. You said you had a clew."

"Hadn't we better get out of this house before we talk?"

"Plenty of time. Mr. Black has gone to the office, and the servants are below stairs. When we are ready we can walk out through the front entrance without a word to anybody."

Thus reassured, Nattie told how he had left home the preceding night and the events that followed. When he came to the part relating to the man beyond the hedge, the English merchant's midnight visitor, Mori started at him in amazement.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "Why, he was killed in the accident near Kobe."

"Not so. I saw the fellow's face almost as clearly as

I see yours now. It was Patrick Cronin, and I'll stake my life on that."

"Then the scoundrel escaped after all?"

"Yes; to receive his just dues at the hangman's hands, I suppose. But I haven't told you of my clew. I overheard Black and Patrick talking out in the hall there. It seems that Cronin has a letter which he is to deliver without delay to Ralph at some rendezvous. That it relates to Grant is certain. By following the Irishman we can find my brother."

"It will be easy enough," replied Mori, his eyes expressing his delight. "The fellow won't try to hide his steps, as it were. He considers the accident a good veil to his existence. Nattie, it was a lucky inspiration, your coming here last night."

"Then I am forgiven for disobeying orders, eh?" smiled the lad.

"In this case, yes, but don't do it again. How is your shoulder?"

"First-chop, barring a little soreness. It will be all right in a day or two. Come, let's leave here before we are discovered."

The exit from the building and grounds was made without mishap. The lads hastily returned to the Manning residence, where Nattie ordered breakfast served at

once. On entering the garden, the lanky pup used by him as a decoy to Ralph's watchdog came bounding from the rear. He had evidently escaped without feeling the teeth of the larger animal.

The meal was dispatched in haste, then *'rikishas* were taken to the Bund. While Nattie waited in the firm's office, Mori utilized the central police station in tracing Patrick Cronin. In less than an hour word came that a man answering his description had been seen leaving the city on horseback by way of the road leading to Tokio.

"That settles it!" exclaimed the Japanese youth. "We must take the train for the capital at once. That is," he added, anxiously, "if you think you are able to travel."

"I am fit for anything," promptly replied Nattie. "Come, we must not lose a moment."

On their way to the station they stopped at the telegraph office and wired the chief of police of Tokio a full description of Patrick. After a consultation, they added:

"Do not arrest the man, but have your best detective shadow him wherever he may go. All expenses will be met by us."

"To capture him now would destroy our only clew," said Nattie. "He might confess to save himself, and then, again, he might not. If he should remain silent we would have no means of finding Grant's whereabouts."

The nineteen miles to Japan's populous capital were covered in short order. Brief as was the time, the lads were met at the depot by an officer in civilian's clothes, who reported that their man had been seen to take a train at Ueno, a small suburb on the outskirts of Tokio.

"We are doing excellently," chuckled Mori. "The fool thinks he is safe and he travels openly. At this rate the chase will be as easy as falling off a log, to use an Americanism."

"He has five hours' start. We must telegraph ahead to the conductor of his train."

"And to every station."

"That has been done, sir," spoke up the police official. "The last word received stated that he was still on board when the train passed Motomiya."

"When can we leave?"

The man consulted a time-table patterned after those used in the United States, and announced that an express would depart within twenty minutes. Hurrying to a neighboring hotel, the lads ate "tiffin," and returned in time to embark upon the second stage of the chase.

When the train steamed into a way station three hours later a railway employee in gorgeous uniform approached

them with a telegram. Hastily opening the envelope, Nattie read, with keen disappointment :

“HEADQUARTERS, Tokio.

“Our detective reports that the man he had been following managed to evade him at Yowara, and has completely disappeared. Local police are searching the mountains.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

PATRICK SHOWS HIS CLEVERNESS.

Nattie and Mori exchanged glances of dismay.

"Confound it! isn't that provoking?" exclaimed the latter. "That stupid detective had to let him slip just when the chase commenced to be interesting."

"Patrick must have suspected something, and he was sly enough to fool his follower. Now what are we going to do?"

"Get off at Yowara and take up the search ourselves; that's all we can do. Surely some one must have seen the Irishman. The very fact that he is a foreigner should draw attention to him. Don't worry, old boy; we'll find him before many hours have elapsed."

"I sincerely hope so," replied Nattie, gazing abstractedly through the coach window.

After a moment of silence he said, suddenly:

"Perhaps Yowara is the rendezvous where he is to meet Ralph. Do you know anything about the place?"

"No, except that it is a small town of seven or eight hundred inhabitants. It is where people leave the railway for the mountain regions of Northern Japan. In a

remote part of the interior are three volcanoes, one of them being Bandai-San, which is famous for its eruptions."

"Bandai-San?" slowly repeated Nattie. "Isn't it at the base of that volcano where those peculiar mud caves are found?"

Mori eyed his companion inquiringly.

"What are you driving at?" he asked.

"Just this: It struck me that Ralph and Willis Round would certainly try to find a hiding place for Grant where they need not fear pursuit, or inquisitiveness from the natives. I have heard that these caves are avoided through superstitious reasons. Now why——"

"By the heathen gods, I believe you have guessed their secret!" impulsively exclaimed Mori. "It is certainly plausible. A better hiding place could not be found in all Japan. The natives will not enter the caves under any consideration. They say they are occupied by the mountain demons, and to prove it, tell of the awful noises to be heard in the vicinity."

"Which are caused by internal convulsions of the volcano, I suppose?"

"No doubt. The mountain is generally on the verge of being shaken by earthquakes, but it is some time since one occurred. It's a grewsome place enough."

"We will search it thoroughly just the same," said Nattie, grimly.

On reaching Yowara, they found the recreant detective at the station. He had recently returned from a trip through the surrounding country, but had not discovered any trace of the Irishman. He appeared crestfallen and penitent.

The boys wasted little time with him. Proceeding to the village hotel, or tea house, they sent out messengers for three *jinrikishas* and in the course of an hour were ready to start into the interior.

The spare vehicle was loaded with canned food and other stores, as the railroad town would be the last place where such articles could be purchased. Each had brought a brace of good revolvers and plenty of ammunition from Yokohama.

Mori personally selected the *karumayas*, or '*rikisha* men, from a crowd of applicants. He chose three stalwart coolies to pull the carriages, and three *bettos*, or porters, to assist on mountainous roads. One of the latter was a veritable giant in stature and evidently of great strength.

He was called Sumo, or wrestler, by his companions, and seemed to possess greater intelligence than the average members of his class. Mori eyed him approvingly,

and told Nattie that he would be of undoubted assistance in case of trouble.

Before leaving the village, the Japanese youth bought a keen-edged sword, similar to those worn by the ancient warriors, or *samurais*, and presented it to Sumo, with the added stipulation that he would be retained as a guard at increased pay.

The fellow shouted with delight, and speedily showed that he could handle the weapon with some skill. Thus equipped, the party left the railroad and set out for a village called Inawashiro, fifteen *ris*, or thirty miles distant.

In Japan the coolie rule is twenty minutes' rest every two hours. Their method of traveling is at a "dog trot," or long, swinging pace, which covers the ground with incredible swiftness. Mori's skill in selecting the *karumayas* soon became apparent, the distance to the destination being almost halved at the end of the first stretch.

The country through which the boys passed was flat and uninteresting, the narrow road stretching across a broad expanse of paddy fields, dotted with men, women and children knee-deep in the evil-smelling mud.

When a halt was called to rest and partake of refreshments, Mori accosted a native coolie, a number of whom surrounded the party, and asked if aught had been seen

of a fiery-faced, red-whiskered foreigner clad in the heavy clothing of the coast.

The man eyed his questioner stupidly, and shook his head. The sight of a couple of copper *sen*, or cents, refreshed his memory. He had noticed a short, squat foreigner (called *to-jin*) in the interior. He was mounted upon a horse and had passed four hours before.

"Four hours?" echoed Mori, addressing Nattie. "Whew! he has a good start. And on a horse, too. That is the reason we could get no trace of him in the outskirts of Yowara. He must have left the train before it stopped and skipped into the brush, where he managed to secure a mount. He is certainly clever."

"But not enough to fool us," replied Nattie, complacently. "We will be hot on his trail before he reaches the caves."

After the customary rest of twenty minutes, the party resumed the road. As they proceeded the general contour of the country changed. The flat, plain-like fields gave way to rolling woodlands and scattered hills. The second hour brought them to the small village of Inawashiro.

Here was found a well-kept tea house, with spotless matted floor, two feet above the ground, a quaint roof, and the attendance of a dozen polite servants. Before the party had barely reached their resting place, the en-

tire inhabitants, men, women and children, thronged about to feast their eyes upon a *to-jin*.

Inquiry developed the fact that Patrick had passed through the town not quite two hours before. This was cheering news. They were gaining on him. A brief lunch, and again to the road. Nattie and Mori examined their revolvers after leaving the village. Sumo cut a sapling in twain to prove his prowess.

At the end of the fourth mile a crossroad was reached. One, a broad, well-kept thoroughfare, led due north, while the other, apparently merely a path running over a hill in the distance, bore more to the westward. Mori called a halt.

"Which shall we take?" he asked, scratching his head in perplexity.

"That is the question," replied Nattie, ruefully. "Confound it! we are just as apt to take the wrong one as not. If we could run across some person who has seen Patrick we would be all right."

"Here comes a *yamabushi*, excellency," spoke up Sumo, pointing his claw-like finger up the path.

"It is a priest," exclaimed Mori, a moment later. "Perhaps he can enlighten us."

Presently a tall, angular man emerged from the narrower road and slowly approached them. He was clad

in a peculiar robe embroidered with mystical figures, and wore his hair in long plaits. In one hand was carried a bamboo staff, with which he tapped the ground as he walked.

Mori saluted him respectfully.

"Peace be with you, my children," said the priest, mildly.

"May your days be long in good works, and your soul as lofty as Fuji San," replied the Japanese youth, with equal politeness. "Pray tell us, father, have you seen aught of a red-bearded foreigner traveling by horse?"

"I passed him two *ris* back. He was a barbarian, and beat his animal with severity. Which is against the teachings of——"

The good man's words were lost in the distance. Nattie and Mori, with their '*rikishas*' and attendants, darted past him and scurried up the path at their utmost speed. It was scurvy repayment for the information, but the news that Patrick had been seen within four miles acted as a spur.

"Don't falter, men," called out Mori, urging the *karumayas*. "Ten *yen* extra to each if you tarry not until I give the word. On ahead, Sumo; watch for the foreigner. Be cautious and return when you sight him."

The gigantic *betto* scurried up the path in advance and

disappeared past a clump of bushes. The *jinrikishas* speeded as fast as their pullers could trot. As the party darted by an overhanging mass of rock a head was thrust forth from behind it.

The face of the man was broad and burned by the sun, and under the chin was a tuft of reddish whisker. The eyes were sharp and piercing, and they danced with triumphant glee as they peered after the calvalcade.

“Oh, ho! oh, ho! so it’s ye, me bold Nattie? It’s a good thing Oi thought of taking a quiet look to see if Oi was being followed. It’s a bit of a trick Oi learned in India, and it’ll prove to be the death of ye, me boys. Oi’ll just take another path to the rendezvous, and see if we can’t kind of waylay yez.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

GRANT BEARDS THE LION.

It is now time to return to Grant Manning. It is well for the reader to know how the lame youth became the innocent cause of all the trouble. The night of the departure of Nattie and Mori on their trip to Nagasaki found him through with his work at the usual hour.

He parted from Mr. Burr at the door, and taking a *'rikisha*, started for home. While passing through Main Street near the tea house where Nattie had played the memorable game of hide-and-seek with Willis Round, he caught sight of his friend, the secretary to the war minister.

Grant was always ready to do business. Years spent in the counting-room with his father had taught him the value of personal influence in securing contracts. The expected order for arms and ammunition was too valuable a prize for any chance to be neglected.

His acquaintance with the secretary was of long standing. It had commenced at a private school in Tokio, which both Grant and the Japanese had attended in earlier days. The boyish friendship had survived the passing of

time—that greatest strain upon youthful ties—and when the native gained his present position in the war office, he remembered the Mannings.

The greeting was cordial, and an adjournment was made to a private room in the *chaya* or tea house. There the friends talked at length over matters in general, and Grant was given many valuable hints concerning the army contract.

It was past eight o'clock when the conference ended. With mutual *sayonaras*, or parting salutations, they separated at the door, and Grant entered his waiting *jirikisha*. Before the man could start the vehicle a Japanese boy ran up, and with much bobbing of his quaint little head, begged the favor of a word with the excellency.

“What is it, my lad?” asked the lame youth, kindly.

Between sobs and ready tears the boy explained that he was the son of one Go-Daigo, a former porter in the warehouse under the *régime* of the elder Manning. He was now ill of a fever, penniless, and in dire misfortune. Would the excellency condescend to visit him at his house in a street hard by the Shinto temple?

“I am very sorry to hear of Go's misfortune,” replied Grant, with characteristic sympathy, “but wouldn't it answer the purpose if you take this money,” producing several *yen*, “and purchase food for him? To-morrow

you can call at the office and I'll see what I can do for him."

The excellency's kindness was of the quality called "first-chop," but the bedridden Go-Daigo was also suffering from remorse. He feared that he would die, and he did not care to leave the world with a sin-burdened soul. He knew a secret of value to the new firm. Would the excellency call at once?

"A secret concerning the new firm?" echoed Grant, his thoughts instantly reverting to the Englishman and his son. "It may be something of importance. Lead the way, child; I will follow."

Ten minutes' travel through crooked streets brought the *'rikisha* to a typical native house a hundred yards from a large, red-tiled temple. The youthful guide led the way to the door and opened it; then he vanished through an alley between the buildings.

Grant passed on in, finding himself in an apartment unfurnished save by a matting and several cheap rugs. A dim light burning in one corner showed that the room was unoccupied. An opening screened by a gaudy bead curtain pierced the farther partition.

Clapping his hands to give notice of his arrival, the lame youth awaited the appearance of some one connected with the house. Hearing a slight noise behind him, he

turned in that direction. A couple of stalwart natives advanced toward him from the outer door.

Before Grant could ask a question, one of them sprang upon him, and with a vicious blow of a club, felled him to the floor. The assault was so rapid and withal so entirely unexpected that the unfortunate victim had no time to cry out, or offer resistance.

As he lay upon the matting, apparently lifeless, a youth stepped into the room through the bead curtain. He bent over the prostrate form, and after a brief examination, said, in Japanese:

"You know how to strike, Raiko. You have put him to sleep as easily as a cradle does a drowsy child. He won't recover his senses for an hour at least. Bring the cart and take him down to the landing. First, change his clothes; you may be stopped by a policeman."

The coolie addressed, a stalwart native, with an evil, scarred face, produced a number of garments from a chest, while his companion stripped Grant of his handsome business suit. A few moments later he was roughly clad in coarse shoes, tarry trousers, and an English jumper. A neckkerchief and a woolen cap completed the transformation.

As thus attired the lame youth resembled nothing more than an English or American deep-water sailor. To

add to the disguise, the coolie addressed as Raiko, rubbed grime upon the delicate white hands and face.

Then a two-wheeled cart was brought to the door, and the pseudo mariner dumped in and trundled down toward the docks. The youth, he who had given the orders, and who was, as the reader has probably guessed, no other than Ralph Black, left the house by another entrance, well pleased at the success of his stratagem.

Raiko and his cart were stopped by an inquisitive gendarme, but the coolie had been primed with a ready excuse.

"Plenty *sake*; foreign devil," he said, sententiously. "He drunk; take him down to ship for two *yen*."

The officer of the peace had seen many such cases in his career, and he sauntered away to reflect on the peculiar habits of the foreigners from beyond the water. On reaching the English *hatoba*, or dock, Raiko found Ralph awaiting him.

The merchant's son was enveloped in a huge cloak, and he carefully avoided the circles of light cast by the electric globes. At his command Grant was unceremoniously dumped into a rowboat moored alongside the pier, then he followed with the stalwart coolie.

Lying out in the bay was a coasting junk, with sails spread ready for departure. Pulling alongside of this,

poor Grant was lifted on board, and ten minutes later the Japanese vessel was sailing down the Bay of Tokio bound out.

As the ungainly craft passed Cape King, and slouched clumsily into the tossing waters of the ocean, the lame youth groaned, raised his hands to his aching head, and sat up. He glanced about him at the unfamiliar scene, then struggled to his feet. The swaying deck caused him to reel and then stagger to the low bulwark.

He thought he was dreaming. He looked at the white-capped waves shimmering unsteadily under the moon's rays; the quaint, ribbed sails looming above; the narrow stretch of deck ending in the high bow and stern, and at the half-clad sailors watching him from the shadows.

He glanced down at his tarred trousers and coarse shoes, then he gave a cry of despair. It was not an ugly nightmare. It was stern reality. His enemies had triumphed; he had been abducted.

The proof of valor is the sudden test of a man's courage. The greatest coward can face a peril if it is familiar to him. It is the unexpected emergency—the blow from the dark; the onslaught from the rear—that tries men's souls.

The consternation caused by a shifting of scenes such as had occurred to Grant can be imagined. From an

ordinary room in an ordinary native house in Yokohama to the deck of a junk at sea, with all its weirdness of detail to a landsman, is a decided change.

The lame youth could be excused if he had sunk to the deck bewildered and in the agonies of terror. But he did nothing of the sort. As soon as he could command the use of his legs, he promptly marched over to a sailor grinning in the shadows of the mainmast, and catching him by the arm, sternly ordered him to bring the captain.

"Be sharp about it, you dog," he added. "I will see the master of this pirate or know the reason why."

Awed by his tone, the fellow slunk off and speedily produced the captain of the junk. But with him came Ralph Black, smoking a cigar, and with an insolent smile upon his sallow face.

"Ah! Grant, dear boy," he said, with a fine show of good fellowship; "I see you have quite recovered from your little accident."

"Accident, you scoundrel!" exclaimed the lame youth. "What do you mean? I demand an explanation of this outrage. Why am I dragged out here like a drunken sailor? You must be crazy to think that you can perpetrate such an injury in this century without being punished."

"I'll take the chances," replied Ralph, with a sneer.

Then he added, angrily: "Be careful how you call names, and remember once for all that you are in my power, and if I say the word, these sailors will feed you to the sharks. In fact, I really think it would be best, anyway."

"I always thought you off color, but I never believed you would prove to be such a cold-blooded villain as you undoubtedly are. You and your worthy father couldn't meet business rivals in the open field of competition, but you needs must resort to violence and underhand methods. I'll have the pleasure of seeing both of you behind the bars before——"

With a snarl of rage, the merchant's son sprang upon the daring speaker. Grasping him by the throat, he called loudly to the junk's captain:

"Over with him, Yoritomo! Help me throw him into the sea. Dead men tell no tales!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A PLAN, AND ITS FAILURE.

The lower order of criminals are seldom courageous. Personal bravery is not found in the same soul that harbors a disregard for laws human and divine. The thief cornered in the dark will fight, but simply with the desperation of a rat at bay.

It was to this natural law that Grant owed his life. Yoritomo, the captain of the junk, was a scoundrel at heart, but he had a wholesome regard for justice as meted out in Japan. A number of years spent on the penal farms had taught him discrimination.

While there he had witnessed—and even assisted at—several executions for murder, and the terror of the scene remained with him. A golden bribe offered by the Blacks had purchased his services in the abduction of Grant, but when Ralph, in his insane rage, called to him for assistance in throwing the lame youth into the sea, he peremptorily refused.

Instead, he called several sailors to his aid, and rescued Grant from Ralph's grasp.

"I'll permit of no murder on my junk," he said in

Japanese. "You have paid me well to help you carry this fellow to the Bay of Sendia, and I will do it, but no violence, sir."

"What do you mean, dog?" shouted the discomfited youth. "How dare you interfere? If I wish to get rid of him I'll do so."

"Not on board this vessel," replied the captain, doggedly.

"I suppose you are afraid of your neck?" sneered Ralph.

"Yes, I am. I run enough danger as it is. How do we know that we were not seen in Yokohama? My craft is engaged in trade along the coast, and is well known. When your prisoner's absence is found out the authorities will secure a list of all shipping leaving the port on such a date. I will be suspected with the rest."

Ralph remained silent. A craven at heart, he would not have dared attack one physically able to offer resistance. The picture drawn by the captain was not pleasant. What if the truth should be discovered? It would mean disgrace and a long term in prison. And he had just contemplated a murder!

The punishment for such a crime is death. The youth shuddered at his narrow escape. He scowled at his pris-

oner, then stalked aft to the mean little cabin under the shadow of the wing-like sails.

Grant had been a silent spectator of the scene. When Ralph made the violent attack on him, he struggled as best he could, but he was no match for his athletic assailant, and would have undoubtedly succumbed if it had not been for the timely aid of the captain.

The latter's unexpected action sent a ray of hope through the lame youth. Possibly he could be bribed to further assist him! Grant was philosopher enough to know that honor does not exist among thieves. The bonds of fraternity found among honest men is unknown in the criminal walks of life.

When Ralph left the deck Grant drew Yoritomo aside, and boldly proposed a plan evolved at that moment by his fertile brain. He did not mince words, but went to the point at once.

"Captain, a word with you," he said. "I wish to tell you that you are making a bad mistake in being a party to this abduction. You probably know the laws of your country, but you do not know that such crimes against foreigners are punishable by death in many cases."

Yoritomo shifted uneasily, but made no reply.

"Do you know who I am?" continued Grant, impressively.

The captain shook his head.

"Indeed! You must belong to one of the lower provinces, then. Have you ever heard of the firm of Manning & Company, dealers and importing merchants?"

"Yes."

"Well, my name is Grant Manning, and I am now head of the firm. I am also a personal friend of his excellency, Yoshisada Udonno, of the War Department, and of the Superintendent of Prisons in Tokio. Ah, I see that you know what the latter means. You have been a prisoner in your time, eh?"

"Yes, excellency."

The words were respectful, and the lame youth took hope. He followed up his advantage.

"The young man who bribed you to assist in his nefarious plot is crazy. No sane man would attempt such a desperate scheme nowadays. You are sure to be discovered before many days. The detectives are even now after you. I have relatives and friends who will move heaven and earth to rescue me, or to secure revenge if aught happens to me. Discovery means death to you. You are even now standing in the shadow of the gallows."

Grant had lowered his voice to an impressive whisper. The tone, the surroundings, the situation had their effect upon the listener. He trembled from head to foot. He

fell upon his knees at his companion's feet and begged for mercy.

"Oh, excellency," he pleaded, "I crave your pardon. I acknowledge that I am guilty. Mr. Black offered me a large sum to help in your abduction. I need the money, for I am very poor. I accepted, and now I lose my life."

"Not necessarily so," replied the lame youth, repressing a feeling of exultation with difficulty. "If you will do as I say I will assure you of a pardon, and promise you money in addition. What did the Blacks agree to pay you?"

"Two hundred *yen*, excellency."

"And for that paltry sum, not equal to one hundred American dollars, you have run such risks. You are a fool!"

"Yes, excellency."

"Now, I'll promise to see that you are not punished, and I will also give you twice that amount if you head in to the nearest port and put me ashore. What do you say?"

Yoritomo hesitated.

"Remember your fate when the authorities capture you, which they surely will before long. Don't be a dolt, man. I will pay you double what the Blacks promise, and assure you of a pardon besides."

"Can you pay me the money now?" asked the captain, cunningly.

He had evidently recovered from his fears—enough, anyway, to drive a shrewd bargain.

"Part of it, and give you good security for the balance," replied Grant, confidently.

He reached in the pocket where he generally kept his purse, but found it empty. A hurried search disclosed the fact that his valuable gold watch and a small diamond stud were also gone. He had been robbed.

"The confounded thieves!" he exclaimed. "They have completely stripped me."

"Then you have no money?" asked Yoritomo, incredulously.

"No; I have been robbed by those people. I will give you my word that I'll pay you the four hundred *yen* the moment I set foot in Yokohama. Or, if you wish, I'll write a note for the amount, and you can collect it at any time."

"Have you anything to prove that you are Grant Manning?" queried the captain, suspiciously.

Grant bit his lips in annoyance. The question boded ill for his chances of escape. The hurried search through his pockets had shown him that he had nothing left; not

even a letter or a scrap of paper. He was compelled to answer in the negative.

"I thought so," cried Yoritomo, scornfully. "You have tried to play a pretty game, my brave youth, but it didn't work. You Grant Manning? Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Black told me who you are. You are a rival in love, and he is taking this means of getting rid of you. So you would try to wheedle me with lies? I have a mind to let him throw you overboard as he intended. Begone forward, or I'll tell my men to scourge you!"

"You are making a serious mistake," replied Grant, with dignity. "You will live to repent your actions. I am——"

"Begone, I say!" interrupted the captain, menacingly. "Here, Tomo, Haki, drive this fool forward!"

Sick at heart and almost discouraged, the lame youth limped toward the bow. As he passed the mainmast a coolie slipped from behind it and entered the cabin. It was Raiko, Ralph's man. He had overheard the futile attempt, and proceeded forthwith to tell his master.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GRANT ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE.

During the rest of the voyage up the coast Grant was kept forward with the sailors. Ralph carefully avoided him, and, in fact, seldom appeared on deck.

Shortly before midnight on the second day out the prisoner was awakened from a troubled sleep by the entrance of several men in his little apartment forward. One of these was Raiko. Without a word of explanation, the coolie seized Grant and with the aid of his companions, bound him hand and foot.

An hour later the junk was brought to anchor and the sails furled. Then a boat was lowered, and Grant, Ralph, and Raiko were rowed ashore by members of the crew. As they left the craft, Yoritomo leaned over the clumsy rail, and called out, sneeringly :

“How about that four hundred *yen* and the free pardon? Your little plan didn’t work, eh? Farewell, excellency, Grant Manning!”

The prisoner maintained a dignified silence, but at heart he felt sore and discouraged. While on the junk he considered himself almost safe from violence, but Ralph’s

cowardly assault and the grim, evil face of the coolie, Raiko, boded little good.

The night was clear, and a full moon cast its mellow rays over the scene. The junk had anchored in an extensively landlocked bay. Across to the right were several twinkling lights, proclaiming the presence of a town. But where the boat had landed were simply clumps of bushes and sandy dunes.

The little party set out at once for the interior. Grant's feet had been loosened, but his hands still remained fastened. Raiko walked in advance, and it soon became evident that he was familiar with the country. At the end of the first hour a halt was made in a grove of trees near a hill.

The coolie disappeared, leaving the prisoner in Ralph's care. After he had gone Grant attempted to engage the merchant's son in conversation, but without avail. He absolutely refused to speak. Presently Raiko returned with three horses and another native.

The lame youth was lifted upon one and secured in such a manner that he could not escape; then the others were mounted by the remaining members of the party and the march resumed.

Raiko went first, as usual, then Ralph, leading the prisoner's steed, and finally the new coolie bringing up the

rear. It was a strange procession, but there were none to witness it, the narrow paths followed being entirely deserted.

Several hours passed in this manner. The moon sank behind the western mountains, leaving the scene in darkness. Mile after mile was covered without a halt. The aspect of the country changed from hill to plain, from valley to heights. Rivers were forded, bridges crossed, and lakes skirted, and still no word between the members of the cavalcade.

During all this time Grant had not remained idle. He was not a youth prone to despair. The result of his conversation with the junk's captain had certainly discouraged him for the moment, but with the vivacity of youth he speedily recovered his spirits and set about for a way to better his situation.

In the first place, he found that the jolting of his mount, which he had railed against at the commencement, had actually loosened his bonds. His arms had been tied behind him with a leather thong around the wrists and elbows.

The discovery sent a thrill of hope through him. Working steadily, but without making the slightest sound, he finally succeeded in freeing both hands. The operation

took some time, and it was not until after the moon had disappeared that he completed the task.

Meanwhile, his mind had also moved rapidly. He formulated a plan. It was nothing less than to wait for a favorable opportunity, and to make a bold dash for freedom. Burdened as he was, with a deformed and feeble frame, Grant was no coward, nor was he lacking in valor of spirit.

He knew that the attempt would be productive of danger. It would draw the fire of his companions, and, moreover, lead to terrible risks to life and limb, but he was perfectly willing to brave all if by so doing he could effect his escape.

During the weary hours spent on board the junk he had thought over his abduction and the events leading to it. The actions of the Blacks were almost inexplicable. It had never occurred to him that they would resort to such desperate measures.

He had read of such cases in books of romance treating of life in the earlier centuries, but to believe that an English merchant in Japan should carry off a business rival in the present day was almost beyond his credulity.

"It is the last move of a man driven to the wall," he had concluded, and not without a feeling of triumph, it must be confessed. "We have taken the market from him,

and simply because the market chose to come to us, and we have beaten his firm and others in both the export and import trades. And as a final straw, it seemed as if the valuable army contracts would also come to us. Fool! he should have known that Nattie and Mori could easily secure them even if I had dropped out of sight."

This was not so, and only his innate sense of modesty compelled him to say it. Nattie and Mori, the Blacks, and all the foreign population of Japan knew that only Grant could win the prize. His business tact, his personal friendship with the powers at the head of the government, and his well-known reputation for honesty were the virtues forming the magnet that would attract the golden plum.

The outrageous assault of Ralph on board the junk had shown Grant how desperate his enemies were. It hinted strongly at nothing short of murder. No man, no matter how brave, can walk in the shadow of a threatened death without inwardly wishing himself free from danger.

Grant was as others in the same situation. He was willing to face any known peril to escape the unknown fate awaiting him at the end of the journey. Then he had a natural desire to turn the tables on his enemies; to cause

their defeat and punishment, and not least of all, to reach Tokio in time to secured the coveted army contracts.

As the night became darker the little party hovered together. As stated before, Ralph was leading Grant's horse, and forming the rear of the cavalcade was the new coolie. Raiko was almost out of sound ahead.

The lame youth felt in his pockets, and to his great joy found a penknife which had been overlooked by the greedy coolie. Waiting until they rode into a narrow valley running between high hills, the prisoner softly reached forward and severed the leading thong. Then, with a fierce tug of his hands, he cause his mount to wheel sharply.

This sudden action brought the horse ridden by Grant in collision with that of the hindmost coolie. The shock unseated the fellow, who was naturally unprepared, and he fell to the ground with a cry of terror. Belaboring his steed with one hand, the prisoner dashed down the valley like a whirlwind.

He had not gone fifty yards before he heard a prodigious clatter of hoofs, then with a loud report a revolver was discharged behind him. The bullet flew wide of the mark, as could be expected under the circumstances, but it served its purpose just the same.

At the sound Grant's horse dashed sideways, stumbled over a hummock of earth or rock, and with a crash,

animal and rider fell in a heap against the edge of rising ground. Fortunately, the lame youth escaped injury, but the terrific fall partially stunned him, and he was unable to resist when, a moment later, Ralph rode up and seized him.

Raiko followed close behind, and the other coolie limped up in time to assist in rebinding the prisoner. After seeing him again seated upon the horse, Ralph launched forth in a tirade of abuse, which he emphasized by brutally striking the prisoner with his whip.

"Thought you would give us the slip, eh?" he cried. "You crippled puppy. I've a good notion to beat you to death! We're having too much trouble with you, anyway, and I think I will end it right here."

"You will receive full measure for this outrage some day, you coward," retorted Grant, whose discomfiture had made him careless of consequences. "None but a brute would act as you are doing. No, I'll not stop talking. I don't care a snap of my little finger for your threats. Do what you please, but remember there will be a day of retribution."

The English youth evidently thought so, too, as he desisted, and mounting, rode ahead with the leading strap attached to his saddle. This time extra precautions were

taken. Grant's legs were fastened by a thong running under his horse, and his arms were securely bound.

The journey was continued without halt or incident until a gradual lighting of the eastern sky proclaimed the advent of dawn. The first rays of the sun found the cavalcade upon the summit of a verdure-crowned hill. Down below, nestling in the center of an extensive valley, was the shimmering waters of a large lake, and, looming massively on the farther shore, could be seen the ruins of an ancient feudal castle.

"Thank goodness! the rendezvous at last!" exclaimed Ralph. "Now, to see if Patrick is here before us."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN FRONT OF THE OLD CASTLE.

In the meantime how had Nattie and his party fared in their pursuit of the wily Irishman? It will be remembered that Sumo had gone ahead as a scout, leaving the others to follow more at leisure. This was found necessary by the increasing difficulty of drawing the *jinrikishas* along the primitive path.

It had narrowed in places to such an extent that only by the most careful efforts could the vehicles be taken past. The road became obstructed with huge boulders, fallen from the surrounding heights, and finally the trunk of a large tree, shattered by lightning, was encountered.

"We will have to leave the '*rikishas* in charge of one of the men," answered Nattie, regretfully.

"It will handicap us considerably," replied Mori, in the same tone. "We cannot expect to catch up with Patrick, mounted as he is. From the speed he has been making, though, his animal must be tired out. I think—what is up now?"

The question was called forth by a peculiar action on Nattie's part. The lad had been standing intently eying

the fallen monarch of the forest. Suddenly he tossed his helmet into the air with a cry of joy.

"What fools we are!" he added. "Why, this tree has been here at least a month."

"Well, what of it?"

"Mori, I am ashamed of you. Can't you see that a horse couldn't pass here? Look at those limbs and that mass of foliage. If Patrick is ahead of us he must have abandoned his horse. Where is the animal?"

"By Jove! you are right. The Irishman must have doubled on us after meeting that priest. Idiots that we are to permit a man like that to pull the wool over our eyes. We must go back and take the other road."

Before Nattie could reply, Sumo scrambled over the tree and advanced toward them.

"Masters, the red-bearded foreigner has deceived us. I met a man half a *ris* up the path. He has been working there since daylight, and he says no one has passed him except the priest."

"That settles it," exclaimed Mori.

"Come; we must return to the crossroad."

"I have also learned that this path and the main road meet about five *ris* beyond this hill," continued Sumo.

The coolie's information was indeed welcome, and little time was lost in retracing their steps. On reaching the

crossroad, however, darkness, which had been threatening for some time, settled down. The coming of night presented a serious obstacle to the continuation of the pursuit.

"I am afraid we must put up somewhere until morning," said Mori, as the party halted.

Nattie instantly expostulated.

"We will never be able to trace Patrick," he insisted.

"No, we must keep on, darkness or no darkness."

"And run the risk of passing him during the night, eh? If he is cunning enough to fool us once, he'll certainly try it again. No, our best plan is to proceed to Invero, a small village, a couple of miles from here, and rest until daylight. Then we can resume the pursuit with some chance of tracking the Irishman. Anyway, we are reasonably certain his destination is the caves at the foot of Bandai-San."

Nattie was forced to acknowledge the wisdom of his companion's plan, but it was with a heavy heart that he gave his consent. The trip to the village was made without incident. Accommodations were secured at a primitive tea house, and preparations made for spending the night.

Inquiry elicited the cheering news that a foreigner such as described had passed through the town several hours

previous. He had halted to secure food for himself and horse, and had then continued his journey.

"We are still on the right track, you see," said Mori, to Nattie. "Don't worry, old boy. This road leads to the volcano, and all we need do is to set out at daybreak and go straight to the caves. I am so sure that we will find Grant there that I have dispatched a messenger to the governor of this district asking for the assistance of the rural police."

"I don't place much faith in them," replied Nattie, doubtfully. "I think we had better proceed alone until we are thoroughly sure Ralph Black and Grant are at the caves. Then we can send for reinforcements. A large body of police would only give the alarm, and probably drive them somewhere else in search of a hiding place."

"All right; I will leave word to hold the gendarmes here until we call for them. Now try to get a little sleep. You will tire yourself out and retard the recovery of that shoulder."

The lad protested that he could not close his eyes, but nature demanded her meed of rest, and he slumbered soundly until the party was called at the first signs of day. After a brief breakfast the chase was resumed, all feeling remarkably refreshed by the night's rest.

"I feel like a new man," announced Mori, quaffing huge draughts of the brisk morning air from his *'rikisha*. "I really believe I am good for a dozen Patricks if it comes to a tussle."

"Which it is bound to do," replied Nattie, cheerily. "You can anticipate a fight, old fellow. Ralph Black and Willis Round will not give up without a struggle. Why, imagine what defeat means to them! They will be compelled to leave the country immediately."

"If we permit them to," interposed the Japanese youth, meaningly. "Yes, you are right. With their scheme ruined, the house of Black will tumble like a mansion built of cards. If captured, they will be brought to trial before the English Minister and probably sentenced to a long term in prison. They must have been desperate to resort to such a plan."

"It's gold—bright, yellow gold, my dear boy," replied his companion, sagely. "It is only another case of man selling his liberty, if not his soul, for the almighty dollar. The hundred thousand *yen* profit in those army contracts proved too much for the Englishman. And I guess personal revenge has something to do with it."

"No doubt. Still it is hard to believe that a sane man would take such chances. I wonder what they expected to do after the awarding of the contracts? They surely

could not hope to keep Grant a prisoner for many months?"

"I have thought it over, and I believe Mr. Black expected to clear out after furnishing the arms and ammunition, if he secured the prize. He felt that his business had dwindled after the organization of our firm, and that he might as well retire with the money realized if he could. He did not anticipate that we would discover his plot and pursue his son."

"Well, I am glad to say that he is mightily mistaken."

The invigorating air of the early morning hours caused the *jinrikisha* men to race along the road at their utmost speed, and it was not long before the party arrived at the spot where the path taken the night before rejoined the main thoroughfare.

A short rest was taken, then, with renewed strength, the pursuit was continued. At the end of an hour a lake was sighted some distance ahead. It was a large body of water, evidently grandly situated in a basin formed by three hills and a lofty mountain. Pointing to the latter, which reared its conical head twelve thousand feet above the level of the lake, Mori said, impressively:

"The volcano of Bandai-San."

"And at its base are the caves?" eagerly asked Nattie.

“Yes, the mud caves where we hope Ralph and Mr. Round have taken their prisoner.”

“What is that on the edge of the lake? It seems to be a ruin.”

“That’s the *shiro*, or old castle of Yamagata. By Jove! I had forgotten that it was here. It is a feudal pile, and has a quaint history. I will tell you something of it as we ride along. The road passes the entrance.”

Bidding the *karumayas* run together, Mori continued :

“It was a stronghold of an ancient *daimio*, or prince. He ruled the country around here for many years. He was very wealthy, and spent an immense sum of money on the castle. You can see by its extent and the material that it cost no small amount. The walls are of stone, some of the blocks being forty feet long by ten feet in width, and many have a thickness of an English yard.

“Those two lofty towers were once surmounted with huge fish made of copper, and covered with plates of gold. You can imagine the temptation to the peasants. One windy night a robber mounted an immense kite and tried to fly to the top of the first tower for the purpose of stealing the golden scales, but he was caught and boiled alive in oil.”

“They had an extremely pleasant manner of executing

people in Japan in the early days," remarked Nattie, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Yes, but during the same period, my boy, the English broke their criminals on a wheel, and quartered them. It was six of one and half a dozen of the other."

By this time the party had neared the ruined entrance to the castle. Nattie's curiosity had been aroused by Mori's tale, and he leaned forward to tell his *jinrikisha* man to stop, when there came a clattering of hoofs from the interior of the castle, and a cavalcade rode out upon the broken drawbridge.

Hoarse cries of mutual surprise rang out, then both parties came to a sudden halt facing each other. A wild shout of joy came from Nattie:

"Grant! Grant! I have found you at last!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SUMO'S ARMY.

For a better understanding of what follows it will be well to explain the situation of the castle of Yamagata, and its general construction.

It was located on the southern edge of Lake Inawashiro, and covered a large extent of ground.

The main portion of the building was well preserved, consisting of a line of massive stone battlements with a lofty tower at each end. In the interior rose a shattered wall, all that was left of the extensive partitions.

There were two entrances, one at the main drawbridge, still in good condition, and another nearer the lake. The latter was choked up with stones and various *débris*. A moat ran around three sides of the pile, connecting with the lake, which touched the fourth wall.

The road ran past the front of the castle, and in the vicinity were numerous huts occupied by coolies working in the rice fields. An extensive forest of maple and willows lined a good part of the lake. Rising in the distance to the north was the majestic peak of Bandai-San.

So much for description.

When Nattie and Mori heard the tramping of horses in the interior they were entirely unprepared to see issue from the main entrance a cavalcade composed of Ralph Black, Willis Round and Patrick Cronin, with Grant a prisoner in the center.

The party was further augmented by Raiko and two brother coolies. For an instant the mutual surprise was so great that neither side made a movement. Nattie broke the spell by leaping from his *'rikisha* with the glad cry:

"Grant! Grant! I have found you at last!"

The words had scarcely left his lips when Ralph Black, who was in advance, dashed the spurs into his horse, and whirled around. There was a brief scramble and confusion, then the whole cavalcade rode helter-skelter back into the castle.

Grant was dragged with them, being still tied hand and foot. An instant later, an ancient portcullis, which had survived the ravages of time, fell into place with a crash, completely blocking the entrance.

The sudden retreat of Ralph and his party left Nattie and Mori staring after them as if powerless to move. Their inaction did not last long, however. Wild with rage they darted across the drawbridge, but only to find the portcullis—an arrangement of timbers joined across one another after the manner of a harrow—barring their way.

Seizing one part of it, Nattie attempted to force himself through, but he was met with a bullet that whizzed past his head in dangerous proximity to that useful member. Simultaneous with the report there appeared on the other side Ralph and the ex-bookkeeper.

Both carried revolvers, which they flourished menacingly. Deeming discretion the better part of valor, Nattie and Mori dodged behind a projecting corner of the massive entrance. A taunting laugh came to their ears.

"Why don't you come in and rescue your brother, you coward?" called out the merchant's son. "What are you afraid of?"

The epithet and the insulting tone was too much for Nattie's hot young blood, and he was on the point of rushing forth from his shelter, regardless of consequences, when he was forcibly detained by Mori.

"Stop! Don't be foolish," explained the young Japanese. "He is only trying to get a shot at you."

"But I can't stand being called a coward by a cur like that."

"We will repay him in good time. We have them cornered, and all we have to do is to see that they don't get away while we send for the authorities. Don't ruin everything by your rashness."

"Why don't you storm the castle like the knights of old?" jeered Ralph, just then. "We are waiting for you."

"You are a scoundrel and a fool," retorted Nattie, grimly, heeding his companion's advice. "We've got you in a trap, and we'll mighty soon turn you and your brother conspirators over to the law."

"Talk is cheap," replied a voice from within the castle, but there was far less confidence in the tone. The speaker was Willis Round. Presently Patrick made himself heard.

"Why don't yez lift that fine-tooth comb thing and go out and fight them?" he asked, impatiently. "It's meself that can whip the whole lot, although Oi shouldn't be the one to tell it. Sally forth, Oi say, and sweep the spalpanes intid the lake."

It is unnecessary to say that his belligerent proposal was not adopted by his more discreet companions. There was a murmur of voices, as if the three were holding a consultation, then all became quiet.

In the meantime, Nattie and Mori looked about them. Back in the road were the *karumayas*, still standing near their *jinrikishas*. One of the porters was with them, but Sumo had disappeared. The absence of the giant native struck the boys as peculiar, and they wondered whether he had fled at the first shot.

Through the forest on the right they saw the outlines

of several huts, and running toward the castle were three or four natives, evidently attracted by the revolver report. Turning their attention to themselves Nattie and Mori found that they were in a peculiar situation.

Where they had taken refuge was a spot behind the projecting stone frame of the main entrance. There the drawbridge extended out a few feet, barely permitting room for two. There was no way of retreating from it save across the bridge in plain view of those in the castle.

"Whew! We are nicely situated," remarked Mori. "How are we going to reach the road, I wonder?"

"I guess we'll have to run for it," replied Nattie, doubtfully.

"Yes, and get potted before we had gone three steps."

"Wait, I'll peep out and see if they are still on guard."

Cautiously edging his way toward the center of the bridge, the lad glanced into the interior of the castle. He dodged back with great promptness, and said, with a grimace:

"That bloodthirsty Irishman is standing near the portcullis with two big revolvers pointed this way."

"Where are the others?"

"I couldn't see them."

Mori looked grave.

"They are up to some trick," he said. "I wonder if there is any way by which they could leave?"

"Not without they find a boat, or try to swim the lake."

"Don't be too sure of it. These old *shiros* sometimes contain secret passages leading from the interior. They could fool us nicely if they should stumble across a tunnel running under the moat."

"Confound it! we can't remain here like two birds upon a limb," exclaimed Nattie, impatiently. "We'll have to make a dash for it. Come on; I'll lead."

He gathered himself together to dart across the fifteen feet of bridge, but before he could start a loud hail came from the forest to the north of the castle.

Looking in that direction, they saw Sumo advancing with a whole host of natives. There were at least forty in the party, and each appeared to be armed with some sort of weapon. There were ancient guns, long spears, swords, reaping hooks and a number of plain clubs.

With this martial array at his heels the giant porter approached the scene, bearing himself like a general at the head of a legion. As he walked, he flourished the sword given him by Mori, and kept up a running fire of orders to his impromptu command. At another time it would have been comical in the extreme, but under the circum-

stances, both Nattie and Mori hailed his appearance with joy.

Alas for their hopes!

"Courage, masters!" shouted Sumo. "Wait where you are. We will drive the scoundrels from their stronghold. March faster, my braves; get ready to charge."

But at that interesting moment the little army arrived opposite the entrance. "Bang, bang!" went Patrick's revolvers, and in the twinkling of an eye the whole forty natives took to their heels, bestrewing the road with a choice collection of farming implements, ancient swords and clubs.

Sumo had discretion enough to drop behind a stump, from which place of safety he watched the flight of his forces with feelings too harrowing to mention.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

Despite their position, Nattie and Mori were compelled to laugh. And from within came a hoarse burst of merriment that fairly shook the air.

“Ha, ha! ho, ho! Look at the monkeys, will ye! Watch them run at the sound of a shot. Worra! Patrick Cronin, did ye live to see the day when forty men would scoot from the sight of yer face?”

The fellow's taunts were cut short in a manner unpleasant to his feelings. While he was dancing about inside, crowing over his victory, Mori crept behind his shelter and let drive with his pistol. The bullet cut a hole in Patrick's sleeve, and sent him backward in hot haste.

Seeing their advantage, both Nattie and the young Japanese darted across the drawbridge, reaching the shelter of the forest without mishap. There they were joined by Sumo, who appeared thoroughly discomfited.

“I thought they would fight, masters,” he explained. “But it seems they would rather work in the paddy fields than face firearms. We are not all like that. If you wish,

I will face that red-bearded foreigner myself, and I'll cut his comb for him, too."

"That is not necessary, Sumo," replied Nattie, with a smile. "We know you are brave, but we won't put you to such a test. A man's strength is as nothing before a leaden bullet."

"One good thing," said Mori, "we are away from that trap on the drawbridge. Now we must arrange to capture the scoundrels. Sumo, who is a good man to send to the nearest town for police?"

The porter recommended one of the *karumayas*, and the fellow was immediately dispatched on a run with a written message to the chief official of the province. This matter attended to, Nattie and the young Japanese enlisted the services of a part of Sumo's former forces and established a line of spies around the land side of the castle.

Several natives were sent to a small village on the shore of the lake for boats, then the two youthful commanders established themselves within hailing distance of the castle entrance. They could see Patrick pacing up and down, still alert.

Nattie waved his white handkerchief as a flag of truce, and hailed him.

"What do yez want?" growled the fellow, angrily.

"Tell Ralph Black to come to the door."

"Not Oi. Oi'm no sarvant for the likes of yez."

"But I wish to speak with him, fool. It will be to his interest, probably."

"I am here," suddenly replied a voice, and the merchant's son showed himself through the portcullis. "What have you to say, Nattie Manning?"

"I want to tell you that you will save time and trouble by surrendering my brother."

"You don't say!" sneered Ralph. "And suppose we don't look at it in that light?"

"You are a fool, that's all."

"It is easy to call names out there."

"It would be still easier if I had you here."

"Let me explain matters a little, Ralph," spoke up Mori, quietly. "You are in a bad box, and you know it. You and your father have committed a serious crime against the law by abducting Grant, and you will suffer for it."

"That's our lookout," was the reckless reply.

"We have arranged matters so that you cannot hope to escape," continued the young Japanese. "We have sent a messenger to the authorities, and in the course of a few hours a force of police will come to our assistance. It will then be an easy matter to capture you."

"You think so?"

"We know it to be so."

"Don't be too sure, John."

Now, if there is anything on earth that will anger a native of Japan, it is the appellation "John." It places them on the same level with the Chinamen in America, who conduct the familiar and omnipresent laundry, and, look you, the Japanese rightly consider themselves much above their brother Asiatics.

Mori felt the insult keenly, but he was too much of a gentleman to retort in kind. Nattie—hot-tempered, impulsive lad—could not restrain himself.

"You cowardly brute!" he shouted, shaking his fist at Ralph. "I'd give half of what I expect to own on this earth to have you before me for five minutes."

The merchant's son paled with anger, but he discreetly ignored the challenge.

"What would you do, blowhard?" he blustered. "You think yourself something, but I can bring even you to your knees."

"We will see about that when the officers of the law arrive," replied Nattie, grimly.

"As I said before, don't be too sure. I have not played all my cards."

Mori and Nattie exchanged glances. What could the fellow mean? Ralph speedily informed them.

"Do you think I would tamely submit to arrest and go from here with the certain knowledge that my destination would be a long term in a prison?" he snarled. "Do you think I am a fool? I have a safeguard here in the person of your puny, crippled brother."

Again Mori and Nattie asked themselves what the fellow meant. Was it possible he would be villain enough to resort to personal violence. The younger Manning paled at the very thought.

"What would you do?" he called out, and his voice was unsteady.

Ralph laughed, triumphantly.

"I see I have touched the right spot," he replied. "I'll tell you in a very few words. If you do not permit us to go free from here and give your solemn promise—I guess you had better put it in writing—that you will not molest us for this, and also that you will withdraw from the competition for those army contracts, I'll kill Grant Manning with my own hands."

Nattie was very white when the English youth finished. His worst fears were realized. That Ralph meant what he said he firmly believed. Not so Mori.

"Don't pay any attention to his threats," whispered the latter. "He is only trying what you Americans call a

‘bluff.’ He wouldn’t dare do any such thing. He thinks too much of his own neck, the precious scoundrel.”

As if in refutation of his opinion, Ralph called out in determined tones :

“I mean what I say. I would rather hang than live ten or fifteen years in prison. I leave it to you. You can take your choice. I will give you ten minutes to make up your minds, and if, at the end of that time, you do not agree to my terms it’ll be the last of your brother.”

“Come away where we can talk without being under the eye of that miserable villain,” said Mori, gravely.

“Wait ; I wish to try a last chance,” replied Nattie. He added in a loud voice : “In the castle, there. Willis Round, Cronin, do you intend to abide by Ralph Black’s murderous proposition ?”

“That Oi do, and if he’d take my advice, he’d kill th’ lot of yez,” instantly replied the Irishman.

The ex-bookkeeper’s answer was longer in coming, and it was not so emphatic, but it was to the same effect. Nattie was turning away sadly when he heard Grant’s familiar voice saying, resolutely :

“Do not give in, brother. Wait for the police, and you can capture them. Ralph won’t——”

The sentence remained unfinished. The speaker’s captors had evidently interposed with effect. Nattie and Mori

walked sadly to the edge of the forest. They left Sumo in front of the entrance on watch.

"There isn't any use talking about it," said the former. "We must agree to his terms. I wouldn't have a hair of Grant's head harmed for all the contracts on earth. True, he may be lying, but it is better to run no risks. What do you think about it?"

"I believe you are right. We will permit them to go free, but we'll wait until the expiration of the time mentioned. Perhaps something will turn up. I hate to see that scoundrel and his mates crowing over us."

"I have known Ralph Black a great many years, but I never thought he would prove to be such a thoroughly heartless and desperate villain. As a boy he was headstrong and willful. He delighted in cruelty to animals, and was brutal to those weaker than himself, but I little dreamed he would come to this."

"The boy was father to the man," replied Mori, philosophically. "He had it in him from birth. It is hereditary; see what his father is. Well, the time is almost up, and we might as well go and confess ourselves beaten. Ugh! it is a bitter pill to swallow."

On rejoining Sumo they found that worthy moving uneasily about in front of the entrance. They saw also that the space behind the portcullis was empty. The tramping

of horses came from within, but there were no signs of Ralph or his companions.

"Where in the deuce have they gone?" exclaimed Nattie, anxiously.

"I do not know, excellency," replied the porter. "The funny man with the fire hair and the youth went away from the door a few minutes ago. The tall, thin man, ran up to them and said something in a voice full of joy, then they all disappeared."

"Something is up," exclaimed Mori, then he hailed the castle in a loud voice. There was no reply. Nattie repeated the summons, but with the same result. Now thoroughly alarmed, he and the young Japanese advanced to the portcullis and beat upon it with their weapons.

An echoing sound came from the gloomy interior, but that was all. Sumo was instantly bidden to bring men with axes, and others were sent along the shore of the lake to see if an attempt at escape had been made.

In due time the barrier at the entrance was broken away, and the two lads, followed by their native allies, rushed past into the ruins. Over in one corner of what had been the main yard were five horses tethered to several posts. Stores and articles of clothing were scattered about, but of the fugitive party there was no sign.

A hasty search was made of the different apartments; the remains of the roof were examined; the outer walls inspected, but at last Nattie and his companions were compelled to acknowledge themselves baffled. The entire party, prisoner and all, had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRAGEDY IN THE TUNNEL.

Greatly puzzled, the lads searched the interior again and again. Not a place large enough to accommodate even a dog was omitted. The towers were mere shells, with here and there a huge beam of wood, all that was left of the different floors.

A door opening upon the lake was found, but it had been impassable for years. Masses of *débris*, encumbering the castle, were moved about, but nothing was discovered until finally the giant, Sumo, while delving into the darkest corner of the most remote apartment, suddenly stepped into a hole, and narrowly saved himself by grasping at the edge.

His cries brought the whole party helter-skelter into the room. A torch of resinous pine was lighted, and the mystery revealed. The hole was the jagged entrance to a tunnel, the bottom of which was dimly visible in the rays cast by the flickering light.

"It is a secret exit from the castle," cried Nattie. "Quick! bring other torches; we must follow at once."

"I thought we would find something of the kind," re-

marked Mori, no less excited. "All these old *shiros* have such outlets. It is fortunate we have found this so easily. The other party cannot be very far in advance."

There was much running about, but finally a start was made with an ample supply of torches. Sumo was the only native that could be induced to accompany the lads, the others hanging back in superstitious terror.

Word was left with one of the '*rikisha*' men to hold the police at the castle until word arrived, then Nattie and Mori eagerly descended into the cavity, Sumo bringing up the rear with the sticks of pine and his ancient sword.

A few crumbling steps led to the bottom, which was about twelve or thirteen feet from the floor. A little heap of dust at the lower level bore the imprints of several feet. It was proof enough that the fugitives had entered the tunnel.

A couple of yards from the entrance the excavation made a sharp descent. The floor was thick with slime, and moisture dripped from overhead. The tunnel became smaller and smaller and traces of masonry were found.

"We are passing under the moat," said Mori, elevating his torch. "Ugh! what a dreadful place this is."

Nattie made no reply. He walked ahead steadily, and ever kept his eyes in advance, as if eager to catch sight of the fugitives. Huge rats peered at the party from

sheltered nooks, or darted across their path, as if careless of molestation. The silence was intense; the solitude painful.

Presently the air became foul. It was thick and heavy with an odor like that of a tomb. On turning a corner they suddenly came upon a row of human skeletons stretched out in an orderly manner upon the floor. It was a ghastly spectacle, and brought a terrified cry from Sumo. He stopped and appeared unwilling to cross the bones.

"Come on, or remain alone," said Nattie, grimly.

The giant porter promptly followed them, but his huge frame shook with superstitious fear. At the end of five minutes, a brief halt was made. The tunnel was filled with a dark, moldy air, difficult to breathe. Gasping and coughing, Mori turned an inquiring eye to his friend.

"We must not turn back," replied the lad. "They passed through here, and we can also. Come; we are losing time. See, the torches are burning out. If we do not hasten we will be left in darkness."

The very possibility of such a dread occurrence sent the trio on almost at a run. To be left in darkness in the tunnel, with its ghastly tenants, was terrifying to contemplate. Sumo magnified the horrors a hundredfold through his ignorance, and his plight was pitiful to see.

On, on; the torches flickering; grotesque shadows sur-

rounding them ; the atmosphere becoming more dank and difficult to breathe with each passing moment. Huge rodents pattering before, their sharp, piercing eyes gleaming like the optics of fleeing demons ; a dripping of water here and puddles of foul scum there.

Only one thing strengthened the little party as they sped along, and that was the knowledge that other humans had passed through the same horrors but a few brief moments before.

“How much farther?” gasped Mori, for the tenth time.

“How much farther?” echoed Sumo, with a groan.

“Heart up,” replied Nattie, redoubling his speed. “We must be almost there. Don’t give up. Remember Ralph and the others took the same journey. Are they more brave than we?”

“You are right, my boy. We must persist ; the end cannot be far away.”

They had already traveled a distance at least equal to two city blocks. The tunnel had made various turns, but as yet they had not encountered any side excavations. This was fortunate, as it permitted them to continue ahead without any doubt as to the proper passage.

Presently, to the unspeakable delight of all three, the air became less foul.

"We are almost there," cried Nattie, cheerily. "Courage, courage!"

It was time. The torches, mere pine slivers, had burned away until only a few inches remained. They had started with an ample supply, but while passing the ghastly array of skeletons, Sumo had dropped the reserve bundle in his terror.

Suddenly the one carried by Mori gave out; then Nattie's gave a feeble splutter and expired. Presently, however, the floor in the tunnel began to brighten, and finally, on turning a corner, a feeble speck of light became perceptible in the distance.

"The end, thank God!" shouted Mori.

The echoes of his voice had hardly died away when a most dreadful thing happened. Without the slightest warning to herald its approach there came a terrific rending shock. It seemed as if the very bowels of the earth had collapsed in one great crash.

Nattie and Mori and Sumo were thrown to the ground with violent force, and there they lay mercifully deprived of consciousness, while around them the walls and roof and floor of the tunnel heaved and pitched in the throes of an earthquake.

The disturbance only lasted a moment, but it was some time before the little party recovered. Nattie was the first

to stagger to his feet. The torch had gone out, leaving an impenetrable darkness. The welcoming light—the light proclaiming the exit from the tunnel—had disappeared.

The lad was bewildered, almost daft, and small wonder. He lurched about until at last he stumbled and fell across Mori. The shock brought the young Japanese to his senses. Then Sumo scrambled to his feet.

Panic-stricken, they started to run. Slipping, staggering, sorely bruising themselves against the sides of the passage, they fled in overwhelming terror. A yard, ten yards, a hundred yards, and then they brought up with a crash against an impenetrable barrier of rock and earth.

The exit was closed!

CHAPTER XXXI.

RALPH SECURES REINFORCEMENTS.

"The exit is closed!"

The cry came simultaneously from all three. Shrill and with a terrible weight of despair it echoed through the tunnel. Then came a weird crooning. It was the death-song of Sumo's people.

Mori stopped him with a fierce command, saying, harshly:

"Silence, dog! Would you add to our misery? Silence, I say!"

The result of civilization now became apparent. The first natural feeling of terror passed, the reaction came, and both Nattie and the young Japanese were able to discuss their situation with more or less calmness.

"This is dreadful, simply dreadful," said the latter; "but we must face it and see what can be done to save ourselves."

"What was it, an earthquake?"

"Yes, but not much of a shock. We felt it down here; above ground it was simply a wave of minor strength."

"But others may come, masters," exclaimed the porter, with chattering teeth.

"You are right. We must hasten back the way we came. The shock has barred our passage in this direction; only the castle exit remains to us."

There was little time lost in commencing the retreat. Grasping hands the three staggered along the tunnel floor, walking, running, and even crawling at times. The dust that had filled the excavation immediately after the earthquake soon settled, and the breathing became easier.

Presently Nattie stopped.

"What is the matter?" anxiously asked Mori.

"Grant—what of him?" replied the lad, pitifully. "Do you think they succeeded in leaving before the shock came?"

"Undoubtedly. We saw the exit, and had almost gained it. They had at least ten minutes' start. Don't worry; Grant is safe."

Reassured, Nattie resumed the flight with his companions. In due time they came to the crypt occupied by the skeletons, but Sumo never faltered. That terror had paled before a greater.

A foreboding that another barrier might be encountered brought a pallor to the cheeks of the fugitives. The fear was fortunately without foundation. The passage re-

mained clear, and in due course of time they reached the bottom of the steps leading to the castle floor.

Weary, worn out, their clothing disordered and torn, and with the fear of death still lingering in their faces, the three painfully scrambled into the air and flung themselves, gasping for breath, upon the stone pavement of the inner yard of the *shiro*.

The place was deserted. The coolies and '*rikisha* men had evidently fled at the first signs of the earthquake. Presently a confused murmur of voices from the outside indicated that they were still within easy call.

After a brief moment of rest Nattie staggered to his feet, and, followed by his companions, emerged upon the drawbridge. Their appearance was received with shouts of astonishment and awe. To the superstitious eyes of the natives, they were as beings of another world.

That any mortal could survive the clutches of the *jishin*, or earthquake, while in its domains underground was not possible. With one accord the terrified natives fled for the forest.

They were speedily brought to a halt by Mori, who was in no mood for foolishness. Rushing after them, he grasped the nearest and fiercely ordered him to bring food and *sake*, the mild wine of the country.

"Fools; what think you?" he exclaimed. "We are not

ghosts. We have escaped from the tunnel through the aid of a merciful Providence. We are exhausted, and require meat and drink."

With many ejaculations of awe and amazement the *karumayas* obeyed. Before eating, Mori, Nattie and Sumo removed the tattered remnants of their clothing, and bathed themselves in the cool waters of the lake. Then a few mouthfuls of food were taken.

The wine put new life in the lads. Refreshed and invigorated, they prepared for the pursuit. It was decided without caution that the caves must be reached without delay.

"I am positive it is their destination," said Nattie.

"Undoubtedly. We will follow the scoundrels with the aid of their own horses. Sumo, you and two others come with us. The rest can wait for the arrival of the police. Forward!"

After the party had ridden a short distance, Mori was seen to cast many anxious glances toward the mighty peak of Bandai-San. It was in plain view, apparently on the other shore of the lake, and its sloping reaches spoke eloquently of the ages in which the flow of molten lava had created the majestic mountain.

"What is the matter?" asked Nattie.

"I don't like the looks of the old fellow this morning,"

replied the young Japanese. "Do you see that misty vapor hovering over the summit. That means activity of the volcano. Mark my words, it is on the eve of an eruption."

"Yes, Bandai-San is awaking from his long sleep," put in Sumo.

"That earthquake must have had something to do with it," said Nattie.

"No doubt. It may be the forerunner of a strong disturbance."

As they rode on, the curious cloud became more pronounced. Fearing the recurrence of a shock, the party avoided the shelter of trees, and kept to the open as much as possible.

After leaving the neighborhood of the lake a road was encountered, so bad that it was necessary to walk the horses. At last it degenerated into a mere path among the narrow paddy fields. A collection of rude huts hardly numerous enough to deserve the title of village was reached after a while.

Singularly enough, there were no inhabitants visible. Not the slightest signs of life could be seen save the still smoking embers of a fire outside of one of the houses. This apparent air of desertion was rendered all the more

strange because of the intense interest generally created among the natives by the cavalcade.

"Find out what is the matter, Sumo," directed Mori.

The giant cantered up to one of the huts and rapped lustily upon the wall with his sword. Presently a head was thrust through a hole in the thatch, but it immediately disappeared on seeing the warlike porter.

"Come out of that," Sumo shouted, authoritatively. "Give my masters some information, or I'll burn your hut about your ears. Out, I say!"

There was a moment of delay, then a shrinking, half-clad Japanese coolie crept from the door and cast himself at Sumo's feet. He was evidently greatly terrified. He wailed aloud, and refused to raise his head from the dust. Impatient at the delay, Mori and Nattie rode up and commanded the wretch to speak.

"Did a party composed of foreigners and several coolies with a prisoner pass through here recently?" asked the former.

"Yes, excellency," stammered the man. "There were seven in all. They stopped here, and compelled twenty of our best men to accompany them. They made them carry reaping-hooks and almost all the provisions in town. They took my store of rice for the winter."

"Whew! Ralph intends to prepare for a siege," ex-

claimed Nattie. "What a fool he is! Men and provisions, eh? What can he hope to do against the authorities?"

"Did they state their destination?" Mori asked the native.

"No, but they went in that direction," he replied, pointing beyond Bandai-San.

"That's the way to the caves," muttered Nattie, then he added, aloud: "How long have they been gone?"

"Not twenty minutes, excellency. Look! you can see the dust still lingering above the bushes upon that hill. They are not to the base of the mountain yet."

After tossing the man a couple of *yen*, to repay him for the loss of his rice, Nattie put spurs to his horse and led the way up the path. Presently the party reached a species of tableland, near the summit of an almost inaccessible hill which rose near the base of the volcano.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FLASHING OF THE SWORDS.

The spot seemed wild and desolate, there being no evidence of cultivation or of human habitation. On one side extended numerous deep ravines, which gave an air of solemnity to the scene. The narrow, seldom-used path turned sharply to the left in a direction away from their destination.

A halt was called upon a natural platform overgrown with brambles. Sumo, who had some knowledge of woodcraft, leaped from his horse and examined the brush.

"They have passed here, masters," he announced. "I find little threads hanging to the thorns; and the grass is trampled in places."

"We must proceed with caution," said Mori, restraining Nattie, who had already started. "Remember, Ralph has a number of men with him, and he is liable to ambuscade us."

"I will go on ahead," volunteered the giant porter, swinging his massive sword vindictively. "You follow slowly. If I see anything I will make the sound of a wild crow."

"Don't lose any time in your scouting," said Nattie, impatiently. "Confound them, they'll get away from us yet."

Leaving his horse in charge of one of the coolies, Sumo slipped through the brush and disappeared down one of the ravines. After looking to their weapons, the rest silently followed. They had barely traveled a hundred yards when the harsh cry of a wild crow came to their ears; then before the echoes had died away, the fierce clashing of steel thrilled the air.

"He has been attacked," shouted Nattie, putting his horse to the bushes. "Quick, we have them now!"

With the rest at his back, he dashed down a gentle slope into the head of the ravine. Passing a large clump of trees they came upon a most thrilling scene. Two hundred yards from the hill the valley narrowed to a space not wider than a city sidewalk.

The "gut" was formed by a huge mass of earth, which had fallen from the heights overhead. The bottom was evidently the dry bed of a mountain stream, and innumerable boulders and jagged pieces of flint were scattered here and there, rendering walking difficult.

The scenery was an afterthought. That which instantly attracted the attention of Nattie and Mori was the figure of a native almost as large as Sumo standing at the beginning of the narrow passage. The fellow was

armed with a sword, which he shook vindictively at the party.

Several feet away stood the giant porter, calmly whetting the huge weapon given him by Mori. Farther up the ravine stood the Irishman, Patrick Cronin. The man grinned impudently on seeing the newcomers, then he turned and disappeared behind a mass of underbrush.

"After him!" shouted Nattie, riding headlong into the valley.

"Hold!"

The abrupt warning came from Sumo. He had strode in the way with one hand raised.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mori. And as he spoke he leveled his revolver at the challenging figure standing in the middle of the "gut."

"Don't shoot him, excellency," exclaimed Sumo, imploringly. "That is Raiko, the thug. I knew him in Yokohama. He did me an injury once. Now, I claim satisfaction."

"What nonsense is this?" shouted Nattie. "Would you delay us, man?"

"It will not take long," replied Sumo, with a scowl directed toward Raiko. "I'll promise you his head in the song of a stork. See! I commence."

He sprang forward, and with great agility threw him-

self upon Raiko. The latter uttered a shrill cry, seemingly of exultation and defiance, and in the twinkling of an eye the ancient enemies were engaged in what evidently promised to be mortal combat.

Human nature is not proof against the thrill and excitement of war. Much as we deplore fighting, there is something in the clash of arms that fascinates us. From the glorious spectacle of marshaled armies to the duel between individuals, there is a charm not to be resisted by mankind of any degree.

Nattie and Mori were not different in that respect from other lads. They were both truthful, honest, manly boys, with a just knowledge of right and wrong, but deep down in their hearts was a little of the old leaven with which we are still afflicted more or less.

For the moment they forgot their quest and watched the fight with eager eyes. The two combatants were equally matched. If anything, Sumo was slightly taller, but Raiko made up for the discrepancy in a greater breadth of shoulders.

Both were armed with the heavy two-edged sword formerly used by the ancient *daimios*, and they were fairly skilled in the practice. Raiko had the advantage in position. Where he had taken his stand was a spot elevated a foot or more above the rest of the ravine. Sumo, how-

ever, had greater room in which to swing his weapon, and in case of pressure he had the ravine at his back.

At the first onslaught the play was furious, and the rocks rang with the clash of steel. Cut, slash, went the swords. Backward and forward sprang the antagonists. Now to the right, now to the left, dodging, leaping, advancing, and retreating.

In the midst of it all came the hissing murmur of strained voices. Tongues were going as well as arms—words keen with venom; phrases sharpened with hate played their part in the fierce duel.

Presently the fury of the combat had slackened. Nature was calling a halt. Of the two, Raiko had suffered the most. He was bleeding in a dozen places. But Sumo had not entirely escaped. A broad, raw wound on his right thigh showed where his antagonist's sword had tasted blood.

Like two bucks weary with strife, the twain backed away from one another and, leaning upon their weapons, glared with unabated hatred. The respite was momentary. Ere Nattie and Mori could speak they were at it again.

"Dog! Robber of the lame!" shouted Sumo, aiming a shrewd blow at his enemy. "Your career is ended. Now for a taste of revenge. Remember the night at the *mat-*

suru? Remember the cowardly thrust thou gavest my brother?"

"Yes; and I have one such for thee, worm!" retorted Raiko. "Thou bulk of nothingness, I'll send thee to the offal heap to-day, and—ugh! ugh!"

With a harsh cry, almost inhuman in its intensity, he fell against the side of the ravine, sent there by a terrible downward blow from Sumo's triumphant sword. Leaping upon his prostrate enemy, the giant porter gave a sweep of the weapon, then he stood erect with Raiko's gory head in his grasp!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"GRANT! BROTHER, IS IT YOU?"

The scene was tragic. A ray from the afternoon sun glinted down through a rift in the foliage, bringing out in bold relief the warrior figure of the giant. Thus he stood for a moment, evidently tasting his triumph to the full, then, with a contemptuous laugh, he tossed the head of his fallen foe upon the prostrate trunk.

"Send me to the offal heap, thou braggart?" he exclaimed. "Where art thou now, Raiko? It was a lie to be answered with the rest of thy sins at the foot of the throne of Buddha. Poof! that was an easy fight. Now I try conclusions with the fiery-bearded foreigner."

Turning, he sped up the ravine and vanished from sight, leaving Nattie and Mori eying one another in astonishment.

"What a bloodthirsty wretch it is!" said the latter.

"Civilization is merely skin deep in some," dryly replied his companion. "This is a sorry spectacle even in the interior of your country. Don't you think we should feel ashamed?"

"I don't know but that you are right," was the naïve

reply. “But, confound it all, Nattie, Sumo had great provocation, and, remember, he fought in our interests.”

“Then we will forgive him. I’ll harbor a little contempt for myself for some time, though. Let somebody bury the body, or take it to the nearest village. Come; we have lost too much time as it is.”

“Sumo is as rash as he is brave,” remarked Mori, as he rode along at his friend’s side. “If he don’t watch out, Patrick will nab him.”

While trotting across a rocky shelf, Nattie chanced to look up toward the cone of the nearby volcano. To his surprise, he saw that the vapory mist had given way to a dense volume of pitch-black smoke. Little tongues of flame shot athwart the column at intervals, and hovering over the summit was a cloud of ashes glinting dully in the sun.

“That looks threatening,” he exclaimed, calling Mori’s attention to it.

“By Jove, Bandai-San is in eruption,” was the instant reply. “It is the first time in my memory, too.” Then he added, gravely: “Nattie, this comes at a bad time.”

“Why?”

“If there should be a flow of lava—which is highly probable—our stay in this neighborhood will be dangerous.”

"Does it ever reach this far?"

"No; but we must pass near the base of the mountain on our way to the caves."

"And the other party?"

"They will be placed in peril also."

"Then we must catch them before they reach there," exclaimed Nattie, urging his horse forward. "I don't care a snap for Ralph or his crew, but Grant——"

"Sh-h-h! Some one is coming down the ravine."

A dull noise, like the scrambling of naked feet over the gravel and rocky soil of the dry river bed, came to their ears. It increased until at last it became evident that a considerable body of men were approaching.

"Quick! out of the way!" exclaimed Nattie, turning sharply to the right.

Reining in his steed behind an overhanging mass of earth, he drew his revolver and waited in silence.

Mori soon joined him. They had barely concealed themselves when a score of half-naked natives dashed past, uttering cries of alarm as they ran.

They were apparently wild with terror. The cause was speedily explained. While hurrying down the ravine more than one would pause and cast fearful glances toward the smoking crater of old Bandai-San. The impending eruption was the secret of their flight.

"It is the body of villagers taken away by Ralph," said Mori. "Their terror of the volcano has proved stronger than their fear of the foreigners. Good! I am glad they have abandoned him. Now he won't have such an overwhelming force."

"Did you notice whether the two other coolies were with them? I mean those who were with Ralph at the castle?"

"I think I did see one. Humph! you can rest assured that very few natives will remain in the neighborhood when a volcano is spouting fire. I even wonder that Sumo——"

As if the name carried the magic power of conjuring, it was barely uttered when the bushes on the left slope of the ravine parted and the giant porter strode into view.

"Hail, masters," he said, stopping and wiping his perspiring face.

"Where have you been? What have you seen?" asked Nattie and Mori, in a breath.

"I was in chase of the devil with the red beard."

"Did you see him?"

Sumo laughed grimly.

"Yes, as the hunter sees the hawk in its flight," he replied. "Red-beard is swift in his pace when danger threatens."

"Did you see the others?" eagerly asked Nattie.

"No, but I followed them close to the mud caves. Poof! they are fools. Know they not that the demon of the mountain, old 'Jishin' himself, lives there? And now is his hunting time. See! Bandai-San is angry. He sends forth fire and smoke. Presently the river that runs molten red will flow down the mountainside."

"Are you afraid?" rather contemptuously asked Nattie.

"Not of mortal, master; but it is no shame to bow to the wrath of the gods. Whither go you?"

"In search of my brother," was the terse reply, and the lad set spurs to his horse.

"You shall not go alone," spoke up Mori, riding after him.

Sumo glanced after their retreating forms, then he cast his eyes upward to where the smoke over the crater was assuming a ruddy tinge. It was enough. Tossing up his arms, he started off at a long trot and vanished over the bit of tableland at the head of the ravine. His superstitious fears had proved the victor.

"Mori, you are a friend indeed," said Nattie, when the young Japanese rejoined him. "But I cannot permit you to run unnecessary risks for our sake. Return while you have the chance."

"Not much," was the hearty reply. "Where you go I go. You insult me. Do you think I would leave you and

Grant in the lurch? Not if ten thousand volcanoes were to erupt. Tut! tut! that will do. Not another word.”

“I will say this, old fellow,” gratefully. “You will never regret your actions on this trip. We will find some way to repay you.”

On up the valley rode the two friends, side by side. Presently a place was reached where it became necessary to leave the horses and continue on foot. Shortly after they had dismounted there came a deep rumbling noise and the earth trembled beneath their feet.

Pale but resolute, they strode along. There was a smell of sulphur in the air; the leaves of the scrubby trees were coated with impalpable gray ashes, and a sifting cloud of powdery fragments fell upon them.

Suddenly, while passing around an abrupt bend in the ravine, they saw ahead of them the figure of a youth limping in their direction. Nattie gave the newcomer one startled glance, then he rushed forward, crying:

“Grant! Brother, is it you?”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS FORCES OF NATURE.

It was Grant. Hobbling along as fast as his crippled limbs could carry him, he threw himself into his brother's arms, and for a moment they forgot all else in the emotion of their greeting. Then Mori came in for his well-earned share.

The amount of handshaking and incoherent expressions that followed was wonderful. Mutual explanations were demanded and given with hearty good will. The lame youth told briefly his experiences on board the junk, then he added:

"After we left that dreadful tunnel running from the castle I almost gave up hope. I felt instinctively that you were underground when that first earthquake shock came, and I was awfully worried."

"We escaped, as you can see," said Nattie, with a happy grin.

"If not you are pretty lively ghosts," said Grant, in the same vein; then he continued: "That brute Ralph hurried us along the mountain for a while. Then we stopped at a village and compelled some of the poor natives to accom-

pany us. I tell you, Ralph Black must be crazy. None but a lunatic would hope to escape from the law for such an outrage. Fancy him thinking he could take me to a cave in the mountain and keep off the lawful forces of the country."

"It is past belief," remarked Mori. "But tell us, how did you manage to escape?"

"I am coming to that. But hadn't we better leave this neighborhood? Ralph and Patrick are liable to follow me at any moment."

"Where is Willis Round?" quickly asked Nattie, noting the omission of the bookkeeper's name.

Grant smiled.

"We needn't fear anything from him," he said.

"Is he dead?"

"No; he helped me to escape."

"What!"

"It is a fact. Wait; I'll tell you. After we arrived in the vicinity of the caves—which are dreadful places, by the way—Round slipped up to me and began to talk about matters in general. Before he had said many words I saw his object. He was trying to 'hedge,' as they call it in racing parlance."

"To crawl out of the scrape, eh?"

"Yes; I led him on, and he presently asked me point-

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blank if I would promise to save him from punishment if he should help me to escape. I replied that I would do what I could for him, but I would promise nothing. He was content with that, and after a while he succeeded in cutting the thongs binding my hands.

"Shortly after, while we were hurrying through a dense copse I slipped behind and ran as fast as I could on the back trail. It was a risky piece of business, as Ralph had threatened to shoot me if I made another attempt to escape."

"And the villain would do it, too," said Nattie.

"I believe he would. The boy is crazy—clean stark crazy. None but a lunatic would do as he has done."

"They must see their mistake now," remarked Mori, grimly.

"They do. Willis Round is nearly frightened to death. Patrick still remains obstinate and advises a general slaughter of all, but I think he is weakening. The natives they took from the village deserted on account of the threatening eruption of the volcano."

All three glanced up to the summit of Bandai-San. The smoke and flame had increased in volume. It was a terrifying sight and instinctively the little party moved toward the head of the ravine.

They had walked only a short distance when a tremor

shook the earth, sending a mass of dirt and rocks tumbling down the side of the valley. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, a thick cloud of ashes was showered upon them.

Now thoroughly frightened, the boys set out at a run, Nattie and Mori assisting the crippled youth, one on each side. Suddenly a dull shock, like the explosion of a mine, almost knocked them prostrate, and directly in front they saw the earth fly from a conical hole in the side of the ravine with the impetus of a hundred-ton gun.

When the dust and *débris* settled, they beheld a small crater, probably fifteen feet in width, occupying a spot a dozen yards above the dry bed of the stream. It was only a small affair as craters go, but the mysterious operation of the natural volcanic forces sent a thrill through the lads, and they scrambled to their feet with but one intent, and that was to leave the place as quickly as possible.

"Come!" hoarsely exclaimed Mori, turning a face pallid with dread to his companions. "We haven't a moment to lose. If an eruption should occur and the lava flow down this side of the mountain nothing could save us from a horrible death."

"Is it as bad as that?" gasped Nattie, glancing fearfully toward the volcano.

The answer came not in words. Suddenly, and with

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terrific force a thunderous report rent the air. Darkness darker than midnight fell upon the scene as if a pall had descended upon them from the heavens. A blinding shower of hot ashes and sand rained in torrents, then—then while the three lads groveled with their faces in the dust the earth rocked and rocked, and rocked again.

Presently—was it a moment or an eternity?—a strange hissing noise became apparent. Multiply the escaping steam from an overcharged boiler ten thousand times and you would only have a faint idea of the terrible noise that filled the air to the exclusion of all other sounds.

For the space of many seconds the earth continued to undulate like the surface of the sea. Explosion after explosion came in rapid succession, each seeming greater than its predecessor, until at last one came that shook the earth to its foundations.

To the three lads prone in the little ravine it was as if the end of the world had come. They lost all thought of time or place. They remained bowed down before the majestic forces of nature, incapable of moving, or speaking, or even thinking.

In time the dread convulsions ceased. Ill with a nausea like that of the sea, Grant and Nattie and Mori finally scrambled to their feet and attempted to run. It was a

futile effort. Their trembling limbs refused to carry them, and they sank back once more.

Let not the reader think it cowardice. No more brave and sturdy youths than Nattie and Mori could be found in all Japan. And Grant—if feeble in frame and prone to disease physically, his soul was absolutely fearless in the common happenings of life.

Only those who have experienced the awful feeling incidental to one of those terrible convulsions of nature called earthquakes can testify as to its effect on the human mind. It is the most mysterious, and the most dreadful force known to man. The writer speaks from experience, having narrowly escaped with his life from one encountered while on a journey through a Central American republic.

It came without warning, and in its duration of not more than eight seconds—think of it!—leveled hundreds of houses and claimed a score of human lives. Its immediate effect was as if the earth was slipping away and one's grasp lost on all things mundane.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RETRIBUTION !

It was some time before the boys could again regain their feet. As the minutes slipped past without a recurrence of the shocks their courage and self-confidence returned. They did not stop to discuss the matter, but promptly obeyed their first instinct, which was to leave the accursed spot without delay.

They had barely started down the ravine with tottering limbs when Nattie, who was in the rear heard a hoarse cry behind him. It was not human. It was harsh and gurgling, like the scream of a wild fowl in the clutches of a giant eagle.

The lad paused and glanced back, then he cried out in horror. His companions instantly turned and looked in the direction indicated by his outstretched hand. Approaching them at a staggering walk was the almost unrecognizable figure of a tall, thin man.

His clothing hung in charred tatters from a frame that seemed bent and distorted, evidently from some great calamity; the hat was gone, the hair burned away, and cak-

ing the lower limbs as high as the knees was a mass of grayish, slimy mud.

As he advanced in a series of tremulous lurches he stretched forth his hands in piteous supplication. Presently he fell to the ground and lay there writhing like a wounded animal. The boys ran to his side. They gave him one glance, then recoiled in horrified amazement.

“Heavens above!” cried Grant; “it is Willis Round!”

The poor wretch at their feet twisted around and revealed a scarred, marked face with sightless eyes. After great effort, he whispered, hoarsely:

“Water! water! Give me water!”

Luckily, Nattie carried a canteen-shaped bottle of the precious fluid. Bending over, he placed it to the sufferer’s lips. With what joy and relief did he drink! The draught placed new life in him. He presently gasped:

“Who is—is here? Is it Grant—Grant Manning?”

“Yes, it is I,” quickly replied the lame youth. “Can I do anything for you? Ha! why do I ask such a question? Quick, Nattie, Mori; we must take him to the nearest town. He needs medical attendance at once.”

“It is too late,” groaned Round. “I am a dead man. The end of the world is at hand, and I am caught in sin. The others——”

“What of them?” asked Grant, eagerly.

"They are gone."

"Dead?"

"Yes; the volcano was shattered by the eruption, the liquid mud and earth—ugh!—rolled down to the caves. I saw it in time and almost succeeded in—in escaping. But Ralph and Patrick were buried under thousands—ugh!—of tons of molten earth."

For the first time since the convulsion the boys glanced up at the peak of Bandai-San. To their awe they saw that its shape had been totally changed. Instead of the graceful cone with its dimple of a crater, it now seemed shorn of half its height. The summit was simply a jagged edge of cliff-like reaches.

*In plain view to the left was a peculiar river, almost black in color, and evidently rolling down the steep slope of the mountainside like the waters of a cascade. Dense clouds of steam hovered over it, and plainly apparent in the air were strange, weird sounds impossible to describe.

The grewsome sight brought back the first feeling of terror, and for a moment the lads eyed one another in doubt. The desire to flee soon passed away, however, and they again turned their attention to the prostrate wretch.

*An actual occurrence. On the sixteenth of July, 1888, the volcano of Bandi-San, in Northern Japan, exploded, killing a thousand people. The mountain was almost rent asunder, one-third being turned into liquid mud!

A change was coming over him. It needed no medical skill to tell that the man was dying. Nattie gave him more water, and others made a couch of their coats, but that was all. Willis Round was beyond mortal aid. In the course of half an hour he gave a gasp, half arose upon his elbow and then fell back lifeless.

He was buried where he had died. Scooping a shallow grave in the soft earth he was placed tenderly within and left to his last rest. As they hurried away from the spot a strange silence fell upon Grant and his companions.

One brief hour before they had been eager in their denunciations of Ralph Black and his fellow conspirators. Now all that was changed. An awful fate had overtaken them in the very midst of their sins. In the presence of the dread retribution all animosity was forgotten. Their death was from the awful hand of Nature, and their tomb under thousands of tons of Mother Earth!

With all possible speed the boys left the eventful ravine. The horses tethered near the spot of tableland had disappeared, evidently stampeded by the convulsions. In due time the village from which Ralph had taken his reinforcements was reached. It was entirely deserted.

At a small town beyond the castle of Yamagata, reached late in the afternoon, Sumo was found with other natives more brave than their fellows. The giant porter became

wild with delight and ran forth to meet the tired wayfarers.

"Welcome! thrice welcome!" he shouted, bowing his huge bulk almost to the ground. "And thou escaped from old 'Jishin' after all? Glad am I, excellencies; glad am I! But where are the fugitives? And where is the foreigner, old Red-Beard?"

"They are dead," gravely replied Mori. "They were killed by the eruption. Get us meat and drink at once, coward. I am minded to punish you for your desertion, dog."

Sumo shrugged his shoulders philosophically.

"As thou wilt, little master," he replied. "Punish if it be in thy heart. I would have fought for thee if mortal enemies threatened, but what is my puny arm to that of the underground demon?"

"I do not blame you for running away, Sumo," spoke up Nattie, with an involuntary shudder. "It was an awful experience, and one I have no desire to meet again."

"Amen!" fervently exclaimed Grant.

That afternoon and night the boys rested. At daybreak on the following day they started for the nearest railway station, in *jinrikishas*. As reports came in from the country nearest to the other slope of Bandai-San the terrible nature of the calamity became apparent.

Whole towns had been swept away by the dreadful sea of molten mud thrown from the crater. Thousands had been injured, and a thousand lost. Many miles of land had been ruined. The destruction was almost irreparable.

At Tokio the boys purchased new outfits. They remained a few hours in the capital, and then left for Yokohama. At Nattie's personal request, Sumo had accompanied them. It was the lad's intention to install the giant as a factotum of the firm in the counting-room. It was late in the morning when they steamed into the railway station. As they left the train, Mori turned to Grant with a cry of dismay.

"By Jove! do you know what day this is?" he asked, excitedly.

"No—that is—it's——"

"The first of August, and the bids for those army contracts are to be opened at noon!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

"The army contracts!" echoed Grant. "Why, bless my soul, you are right! This is the day set by the war department for opening them."

All three lads instinctively glanced at the station clock.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Nattie; "it's after eleven!"

"In less than an hour the board will sit, and at Tokio—twenty miles away!" Mori cried. "We have lost the chance after all."

"Not without a struggle," firmly replied the lame youth. "There's Mr. Burr over there. He is here to meet us. Nattie, take him to the nearest stationer, and purchase three or four quires of official paper, pen and ink. Be back in five minutes. Mori, come with me."

While Nattie, too bewildered to speak, hurried away on his errand, Grant grasped the Japanese youth's arm, and almost ran to the station master's office. They found the official seated at his desk.

"What time does the next train leave for the capital?" asked Grant.

"At eleven-thirty, sir."

"Too late. How long will it take you to start a special train?"

The railway employee stared at his questioner in surprise.

"A special train for Tokio?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We couldn't have it ready under twenty minutes. Why, what——"

"Never mind the reason, sir," interrupted Grant, impatiently. "I must be in Tokio before twelve o'clock."

"It is impossible, sir."

"Not at all. It must be done. Where is the engine that brought the train in a few moments ago?"

"It is still in the station, but it will go to the running sheds before long."

"I must have that engine," exclaimed Grant, with determination. "I will pay you five hundred *yen* for an hour's use of it. I will also give a bonus of fifty *yen* each to the engineer and fireman."

Five minutes later a powerful locomotive left the station, bearing the party. A small table had been secured, and hard at work upon it was Mr. Burr, writing for dear life as Grant dictated.

The line was clear, telegraphic orders having been sent to that effect from Yokohama, and the intricate mass of

iron flew upon its journey at the rate of seventy miles an hour.

It was a strange spectacle, and one never before witnessed in all Japan. To the engineer and fireman, native born, it was a novelty indeed, and they cast many curious glances at the group upon the tender.

As the miles were covered at terrific speed, the ponderous engine swayed and rocked like a ship in distress. But amid the lurching and tossing of the fabric, Grant stood imperturbably droning word after word, sentence upon sentence, while the canny Scot jotted them down as best he could.

The document was a lengthy one, full of circumlocution and dreary phrases, but at the end of twelve minutes, when the outskirts of Tokio came in sight, it was finished. The three members of the firm affixed their names just as the panting engine came to a sudden stop in the railway station of the capital.

Jinrikishas with fleet *karumayas* had been ordered by telegraph. The distance to the war department was at least a mile. Springing into the vehicles, the party were carried swiftly through the streets, a promise of ten times the usual fare having lent wings to the men's feet.

A clock observed midway indicated a quarter of twelve.

"On, on, men!" cried Grant, imploringly. "Fifty *yen* each if you do it before the stroke of twelve."

The promise was as a whip to a spirited horse. From lagging steps the *karumayas* bounded into a run. Down the narrow streets they darted, past gardens, through thoroughfares crowded with pedestrians; on, on, until at last, with a final spurt, the four *jinrikishas* came to a halt in front of the Japanese war office.

Leaving Mr. Burr to settle with the coolies—who had well earned their pay—Grant dashed into the building just as the first stroke of a sonorous bell overhead proclaimed the hour of noon.

As he passed through the entrance he noticed a door at the right bearing upon its panels in Japanese, "War Department. Office of the Army Board." It was standing slightly ajar, and from the interior came a confused murmur of voices.

Something prompted Grant and his companions to stop and peer through. Seated at a large desk were several officers in uniform and other gentlemen in civilian's clothes. In the center was Yoshisada Udon, Grant's friend. Occupying chairs in the main portion of the room were the German merchants of Yokohama, Swartz and Bauer, and Ralph's father, Jesse Black.

The warning bell had reached the seventh stroke!

Arising to his feet with a triumphant smile upon his lean, suave face, the English merchant advanced to the desk and laid thereon a packet. As he turned to resume his seat there was a noise at the door, and the lame youth marched in with calm dignity.

"Ah, I see I am just in time," he said, with a pleasant smile. "Mr. Udon, will you please accept our bid for the contracts?"

"Certainly, Grant, with the greatest pleasure," quickly replied the secretary. "Where have you been? I actually thought you would be——"

He was interrupted by a snarl of mingled stupefaction and rage. Mr. Black, who had been staring open mouthed at the lads, sprang forward, and shouted:

"It is too late! It is past the time. The hour of twelve——"

"Has not struck yet," quietly interrupted Grant. "Listen! ten, eleven, twelve! I was three seconds to the good."

If ever baffled fury sat enthroned on a man's countenance it did then upon that of the English merchant. He was speechless with anger and disappointment. Shaking his fist in Grant's face, he stammered and choked in a futile effort to berate him.

"Mr. Black, a word with you," suddenly said Nattie, stepping up.

The lad's tone was full of meaning. He turned and added to his brother and Mori:

"Let us leave for some quiet place and have it over with. You know we have a sad duty to perform."

"What, what's that?" asked the merchant, in alarm, recovering his speech. "My son Ralph! What of him? Don't tell me he is injured."

"Come with us," replied Grant, evasively.

Leaving Mori to make a brief explanation to Mr. Udon, Nattie and he took the Englishman into a side room and there told the story of his son's awful end.

It is a strange commentary on human nature that even the vilest beast contains a well of tenderness. The hand that slays in cruel sport can also caress with fond affection. The African mother has her maternal love; the foulest rogue a word of kindness.

Mr. Black was an unscrupulous man. He was a scoundrel at heart, but there was an oasis in the desert of his immoral nature. It was his love for his son Ralph. The news of his offspring's death came as a terrible blow. His grief was pitiful.

The spectacle of a strong man weeping in agony of spirit swept away all thoughts of punishment. Grant exchanged glances with his brother, and then said, sadly, but with firmness:

"Mr. Black, we know everything. We know fully your connection with the foul plot to abduct me, but we are content with our triumph over you. We could have you arrested and sent to prison for a term of years, but we will be merciful. You can go forth in freedom, but on certain conditions."

The miserable man stood listening with bowed head.

"You must leave Japan at once," continued Grant, "and also make restitution of the money overpaid to you on account of our father's debt. That debt was paid to you before his death, and you know it."

"No, Grant, your father did not pay me," replied Mr. Black, brokenly.

"Then you still deny it!" exclaimed the lame youth, his voice growing hard.

"I will explain. I received part of the money, but not from your father. The day Mr. Manning died in his office I received a call from Willis Round. He said that he had taken the fifty-six hundred dollars in gold from the safe, and would divide with me if I would promise to back him up in pushing the firm to the wall. It was his idea to purchase the good will of the business at a forced sale and start in for himself. I—I consented, but our plans have failed."

"Through no fault of yours," said Nattie, *sotto voce*.

"Do you agree to the conditions?" asked Grant.

"Yes, I will do as you say," replied the disgraced merchant. "I will repay you and leave this country at once. I am content to do so. Oh, Ralph, my son, my son!"

He tottered from the room, and that was the last the lads saw of him. On the following day a messenger brought to them in their office at Yokohama a package of money containing the amount previously paid to Mr. Black.

Before the end of the week he had settled up his affairs and left Japan. It was heard later that he had returned to England, where he went into retirement with the money saved from his business. It is to be hoped he sought repentance for his misdeeds.

In these o'er-true tales it is a pleasure to part with some characters, but painful to bid farewell to others. A writer has his likes and dislikes, even in his own literature. It is said that the immortal Dickens cried when he penned the description of Little Nell's death in the "Old Curiosity Shop," and that his heart stirred with a curious anger as he chronicled the villainies of Bill Sykes in another story.

It is probably for a similar reason that I do not like to write the words that will put an end for all time to Grant and Nattie and Mori. We have spent many pleasant half

hours together. It has been a pleasure to depict their honesty, and manliness, and truth, to watch their brave struggle against misfortune, and at last to record their final triumph.

They will succeed in life—integrity and moral worth always do. They secured the famous contract, and made a legitimate profit from it. That was before the recent war between China and Japan. They invested their increased capital, and are now, at the present date, on the fair road to fortune.

Mr. Burr is the manager of their Yokohama house. Mori is in general charge of the business in Japan, and Grant and Nattie are now traveling in the United States visiting their relatives and quietly keeping an eye out for the trade.

Sumo is established in the main office as porter and messenger. He sports a gorgeous uniform and is ever relating to the small boys of the neighborhood his memorable fight with Raiko, the thug, at the foot of old Bandai-San.

And now, in the language of those gentle people, the Japanese, I will say "*Sayonara!*"

THE END.

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